COMIC SCENE

Your Complete Guide to Comics

THE STATE OF INDEPENDENTS

YEARBOOK 2020

THE BEST INTERVIEWS & REVIEWS
FROM THE WORLD OF INDIE
& SMALL PRESS COMICS

BONUS! EXCLUSIVE COMIC PAGES
FROM SHIFT ANTHOLOGY

FIRST LOOK! PAT MILLS' NEW SERIES SPACE WARP!

UGHH! THIS COMIC IS BORING! SO CLICHÉ
LOL A LOT DAILY COMIC!
FRIENDS, HOD HAVE 'EM, EH?
GASP! DID SOMEONE SAY BORING??
WHAT THE?!!
THERE'S NO PROBLEM STATING THE OBVIOUS, CHAP!
PUFF
PUFF
CALL A SPADE A SPADE, EH?
YOU KNOW WHAT? BECAUSE YOU'VE GOT SUCH A CHAMPION FACE, I'LL LET YOU IN ON A LITTLE SECRET...
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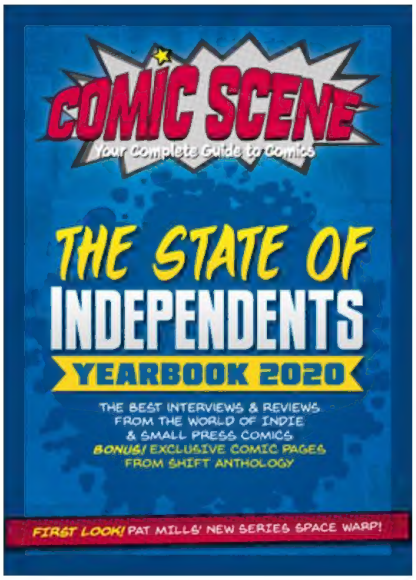

Welcome to a very exciting project for ComicScene. Working with Pipedream Comics we are bring you our first State of Independents Yearbook where we celebrate new material from indie and small press creators.

One of the pleasures I've had putting this magazine over the last two years has been seeing and learning about this vibrant and eclectic sector. Better still comic fans with an encyclopedic knowledge and decades of comic reading have dipped their toes into something new, thanks to the dedicated work of Alex and the Pipedream Team. We have been very pleased and lucky to work with them as they've guided us through several great titles and the trials and tribulations of getting your work out there through crowd-funders and comic cons.

For our part we've enjoyed some of the work so much we brought some of it to news-stands across the UK and overseas. If you enjoyed Rok of the Reds, Captain Cosmic, Flintlock, Whackoman!, Corker! Comics and more they all started in the indie sector and the creators continue to make great comics every year. You can now buy some of the comics from our website at www.comicscene.org. We also launched the Comic Creators Directory so libraries and schools could contact the creators to do additional comic workshops and talks as well as give you an opportunity to find out more about who they are and perhaps get your own personal commission from them too.

Also in this Yearbook I'm pleased to preview a new comic title comic to news-stands soon. So you better get a Shift on.

Yours aye

TONY

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INDIE AND SMALL PRESS COMIC OF THE YEAR

It was a great year for indie comics in 2019, and **ComicScene** have joined forces with **Pipedream Comics** and **A Place To Hang Your Cape** to bring you this definitive list of the very best!

ATOM AGENCY VOL. 1 (EUROPE COMICS)

If you had to describe a perfect example of a Franco Belgian bandes dessinée then you should show them Atom Agency. Atom Vecorian is a struggling detective who looks to make a name for himself by finding the missing jewels of the wife of the Aga Khan, aided by plucky sidekick Mimi and reluctant 'muscle' and former wrestler JoJo Top. With an enigmatic femme fatale and gorgeous French locations this is a rip roaringly fun read that is packed full of Gallic cool that will have you clamouring for more the minute you reach that final glorious page!

COIN OP COMICS #8 (COIN OP BOOKS)

Our pick of books from this year's Thought Bubble 2019, Peter and Maria Hoey's collection of short stories straddle the worlds of comic and art books with 4 glorious experiments in sequential story telling. Revolving around the theme of infatuation they range from surreal time travel 'what ifs' to an Art Deco version of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth. With immaculate finishing and impeccable design and layout, this hard-cover edition is one of the classiest books we have read all year!

THE EXCHANGE (MADIUS COMICS)

It's been a strong year for Madius Comics and a large part of that has been this unexpected gem. While nominally being about a put-upon teacher going on a job share, it is much more than that, because the school our hero ends up at is in the strange and surreal world of Old Queensdock – where the national motto is "don't be weird". Writers Rob Jones and Mike Sambrook layer the book with quirky humour and sarcastic asides, while newcomer Liam Hill's unique art and neon colours make this into one of the strangest and most hilarious books around.

THE BLACK IRIS (SASSAFRAS PRESS)

Gateway City's Russell Olson created this book as part of last year's Inktober event, but it developed into something much more. A wordless series of single page images based around a fictitious movie. It is packed with a powerful heroine taking on Nazi robots and more, and is the perfect vehicle for Olson's pulpy style. However it also has this really original feel to it thanks to the full page image structure, which is based on '30s and '40s movie picture books. It makes it into something much more original than the usual pulp inspired books we read, and thanks to Olson's masterful use of a brush and pen markers (as well as it's oversized, A4 landscape format) it is a truly sumptuous and gorgeous read.

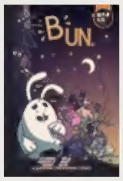
THE GLASS HOOD (LABRAT COMICS)

It's been a bumper year for writer Matt Garvey, and perhaps his most eagerly anticipated book was this return to the world of critically acclaimed Red Rocket Comet. This spiritual sequel to RRC is set in the same universe, but is not a direct sequel and sees Garvey reunited with artist Grayham Puttock and joined by newcomer Stefano Pavan to create another split style super hero/villain stand off. This tale of the villainous Glass Hood getting his revenge on the heroic Commander Justice, after 20 years in prison, feels like a glorious hybrid of crime noir and classic superheroes. It' a fantastic genre mash-up, and while not quite up to the dazzling heights of RRC, this is such a strong concept for a comic that it should keep Garvey and co in quality comics for as long as they want.

HILDA & THE MOUNTAIN KING (FLYING EYE BOOKS)

What was once indie comics best kept secret, Hilda has gone mainstream in 2019 thanks to her new Netflix animated series. However with that step into the limelight, creator Luke Pearson has not let the quality of the source material wane. Quite the opposite, as he has released one of the best Hilda books to date. Hilda and the Mountain King has an emotional depth to it that the previous volumes about our favourite blue haired Scandi scamp couldn't quite muster. When Hilda is turned into a troll, she ends up stuck in the mountains and a troll baby takes her place back home. As a result, Hilda must find the mysterious Mountain King in order to reverse the spell before her house gets completely trashed. While this book is packed with the kind of high energy hijinks that we love in the Hilda books, it is the relationship between Hilda and her mother which is the true highlight. As the previously strained relationship is rekindled in the way that only the love between a parent and a child really can.

THE INCREDIBLE BUN #2 (MADIUS COMICS)



Madius Comics' tale of a giant bunny who goes to the city to find his fortune has evolved from a cutesy animal tale into something much more unique. Writer Mike Sambrook takes what started off as 'Rocky with Rabbits' meets Harvey, and continually second guesses reader's expectations about where the story is heading. Meanwhile artist Rosie Packwood balances cutesy animals, gritty action and ambitious panel layouts with a sublime colour scheme to give this book a real confidence. As a result it ends up being like Watership Down meets Fight Club and is evolving into a really smart and ambitious title packed with originality and hidden depths.

CRY WOLF GIRL (SHORT BOX COMICS)

It's a challenge to pick a stand-out title from your average ShortBox collection, but Ariel Ries' Cry Wolf Girl is a riotous blend of grief, paranoia and empathy. Drawn and coloured with a fierce confidence that wonderfully compliments the schizophrenic nature of heroine Dawa, Cry Wolf Girl is a comic where everything clicks into place and rattles along at breakneck speed. Ries' spry and compact comic bursts with feverish flavour, but never forgets to tell a rich, coherent story.

GUN #6 (RECKLESS EYEBALLS PRESS)

Jack Foster's subversive super villain series has been a perennial favourite at Pipedream Comics thanks to it's winning mix of post-modern capes and gorgeous painted artwork. It's like Superior Foes of Spider-man meets Kingdom Come. However, for this latest issue Foster took a break from the current Slaughterball arc (which sees villains compete in a cross country race with a bomb) and gives us a one off look into a moment from Trevor 'Mr Twist's past. Foster uses the concept of a villain with multiple personality disorder to bring us a strange and twisted romance, that works as a fantastic snapshot of the wonderful world he has created in Gun. It also features some of the most breath taking painted pages we have seen this year and is a stark reminder of how important it is for indie comics to keep their vibrancy and originality going throughout a run. This one off issue is a great time to get into this criminally underrated series!

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EARWORM (RICK QUINN)

Moody, melancholic and meticulous, Earworm is a muted powerhouse of narrative and visual talent. Rick Quinn and Milton Lawson's downbeat tale comments upon the toxic dangers of drowning in nostalgia, whilst Martyn Lorbiecki's evocative art fuse together into an exquisite package of wistful horror. Hassan Otsmane-Elhaou's lettering is the glue binding everything together, resulting in Earworm boasting a delicate yet gripping power.

KILLTOPIA #2 (BHP COMICS)

After a strong debut in 2018, the sophomore issue of Dave Cook and Craig Paton's high tech dystopian sci fi tale begins to really build on that strong foundation and prepare readers for the future. After the action heavy first issue, this is much more about character development and wider world building, all of which helps to really grow the world of Killtopia into something more substantial than just another Bladerunner/Akira wannabe. The story of Shinji, a trainee wrecker and the newly discovered sentient mech Crash continues to build, but alongside it we learn more about the supporting cast, such as the pilot of the King Kaiju wrecker and all conquering wrecker Stilleto. By rounding out these supporting characters it becomes a much richer story, and that in turn makes the stunning visuals and concepts even more enticing.

MILKY #2 (JOSHUA SAXON)

Your local milkman might not be the obvious choice for a hero to take on an alien invasion, but that's what makes Joshua Saxon's series such a fantastic underdog tale. When a group of all powerful aliens try to kidnap earth's women, it is up to milkman Vikander Singh (aka Milky) and a rag tag bunch of misfits to help save the day (especially Milky's unrequited love Lucy). With the style and humour of Simon Pegg movie the Word's End, but mixed with the edginess of a Mark Millar book, this is a fantastically entertaining read and a really unique and very unconventional angle for such a classic sci-fi story. With top drawer production values this is one book which is well worth getting delivered!

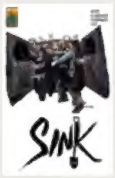
THE SEVEN SAGAS OF SILVERBEARD (CATFOOD COMICS)

As well as being a great comic this was one of our favourite Kickstarters of 2019. With a comic that starred an immortal gorilla and his adventures as a pirate, the campaign also featured the fictitious history of forgotten small press publisher Catfood Comics – complete with a treasure trove of Silverbeard comics. Writer Pete Taylor has revelled in creating this brilliant world, mixing homages to Conan the Barbarian and classic pulp serials, with a knowing nod to classic silver age comics in some of the extras he offered in the campaign. With the book outlining all seven sagas of Silverbeard, thanks to a magazine style catch up feature, this is a book which is about so much more than just the story on the page, and is a reflection of what an original and exciting world you can create in self-funded small press.

THE LEGEND OF LA MARIPOSA: THE DEMON GAUNTLET (JAMES LAWRENCE)

It's been a strong year for wrestling comics, but this new print collection of James Lawrence's excellent webcomic is the true champion! Our heroine is an aspiring luchador (a.k.a. masked Mexican wrestler) who wants to join up with the Sons of Justice, a kind of superhero style luchador group, but she is sent on an initiation mission to claim the masks of four powerful demons. This gives the series a quest like structure that allows La Mariposa to battle an increasingly diverse collection of villains, as well as making each chapter feel like a self contained episode of a Saturday morning cartoon. With that high energy tone exhibited on every page, it mixes colourful over the top characters with a delightful sense of humour to create a book that should appeal to more than just grappling fans, but anyone who likes an action packed all ages adventure.

SINK #6-10 (COMIXTRIBE)



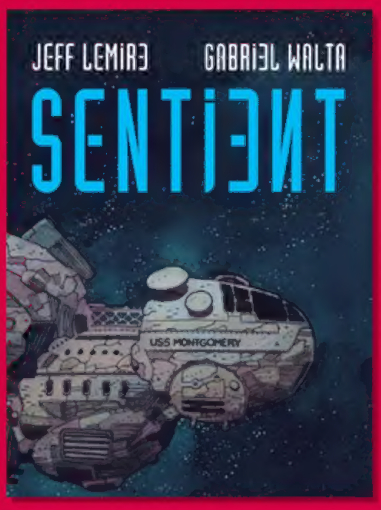
It's not easy to write a really good, nasty, horror comic. The tendency is to replace plot and character with blood and guts in order to shock. However in this tale of life on a Glaswegian sink estate, John Lees has managed to create some truly shocking and unforgettably horrific moments - all the while building strong and engaging characters who make the stories into more than just an excuse for outrageous gross out moments. From an unlikely BDSM romance to a gang of killer clowns in a van, Sink is packed full of the kind of characters you wouldn't want to meet on a dark night, but who are strangely compelling all the same. While not for everyone, Sink is a tour de force of horror, and the rich mix of interconnected character based stories are brought to life with some stomach churning visuals from Road of Bones artist Alex Cormack.

SILENT HORNS (WINE AND ZINE)

The first full length comic from Bryony Evans is a wonderfully potent story about coming of age and acceptance. Yfa is a young hexerei and when their horns come through, they begin to develop magical powers. But when Yfa's horns come through her powers don't appear immediately and so she begins to question why she isn't like her friends. Silent Horns is a beautifully told story, that has real heart and emotional depth to it. On the surface it is your classic tale of puberty and acceptance, yet it feels like it could be so much more than that for any teen who is looking for something relevant to them – especially anything to do with gender or sexuality. With gorgeous pencil style artwork, packed full of expressive characters and sublime detail this is a really accomplished story which feels like it offers a positive message for teens and parents alike.

SPACE CAPTAIN #5 & 6 (NEVER EVER PRESS)

We've seen some fantastic finales this year (from The Walking Dead to Giant Days), but few have had the emotional impact on us that Chris Baldie's Space Captain finale did. Consistently one of our favourite small press books, the Captain has been searching for the meaning of his status as the last living human in the universe, and this year we were treated to not one, but two new issues, in which we see him reunited with his alien friends as well as finding his way back home. However the real emotional treats are reserved for him finally remembering how and why he ended up in this situation. Baldie manages to fill these moments with a really heartbreaking pathos that brings to a conclusion one of the most glorious indie series of recent years.



SENTIENT (TKO STUDIOS)

Jeff Lemire and Gabriel Walta's emotionally-charged sci-fi epic is deeply textured in the personalities of its characters. A group of children forced to pilot a space vessel to safety across the treacherous unknown of space, with only a single A.I. to assist them, quickly blossoms to become a deftly character-driven story of grief, trust and danger. Walta's supple shapes and colours latches onto Lemire's tense story to superb effect. With Sentient, TKO continue to be a publisher of exceptional taste.

MANU: ALTIPLANO VOL. 1 (TACU TINTU PRESS)

Set in a world of cyborg jaguars and deadly augmented assassins who do battle in the South American jungle, MANU is one of the most exciting and original series we have read all year (and was the justified winner of Pipedream Comics; Indie Comic of the Year 2019). After the appetisers that were Trujillø and L1MA, Gustaffo Vargas delivers the main course with MANU. He expands the scope of his amazing world to bring us this first long form story set in his stunning South American sci-fi dystopia he has created. With more time to build characters and develop the world around the action, Vargas' tale of an enigmatic loner who is hunted in her jungle retreat only for her secret past to be revealed is a frenetic, action-packed delight, that would feel right at home in 2000 AD thanks to some quality art and story telling. The action is under pinned by some strong character work and truly stunningly original visuals. This is a real one of a kind comic from one of the most exciting Indie creators working in the UK right now.

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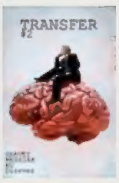
THESE SAVAGE SHORES VOL. 1 (VAULT COMICS)

It's been a landmark year for Vault Comics who seemed to have released a new must-read book every month. One of the true stand outs has been this gloriously exotic series which has become the jewel in Vault's crown. Ram V's South Asian vampire folk tale takes slices of Gothic drama and relocates them to the sub continent which gives everything an exotic and unique visual and cultural setting. With sublimely detailed artwork from Sumit Kumar, this has been a book at the top of our recommendation list for the whole of 2019, and with the first arc now complete you can truly take in all it's sublime glory.

TRANSFER #2 (LABRAT COMICS)



It's been a productive year for writer Matt Garvey, with the release of 7 new titles. Picking which ones made this list was not easy, however our favourite of his books was perhaps the most surprising – the second issue of mind swap thriller Transfer. Set in a world where people's consciousness can be transported around like cargo, courier Steve is caught up in the middle of a situation he cannot get out of when a job turns sour and he ends up in a body he did not anticipate. With one of the best final pages we have read this year, thanks to a jaw dropping twist this has been one of the stand out reads from one of this year's most inventive creators.

STAND IN YOUR POWER (RACHAEL SMITH)

With Stand In Your Power, Rachael Smith has somehow delivered a collection of autobiographical comics that's rawer, more heartfelt and funnier than her previous collection, Wired Up Wrong. Themed around a turbulent breakup, Rachael's warm, pleasant artwork juxtaposes the often unflinching nature of her slice-of-life stories, as she guides us through the ups and downs of pulling yourself out of emotional despair. Stand In Your Power stands as a cathartic roar from one of indie comic's brightest stars.

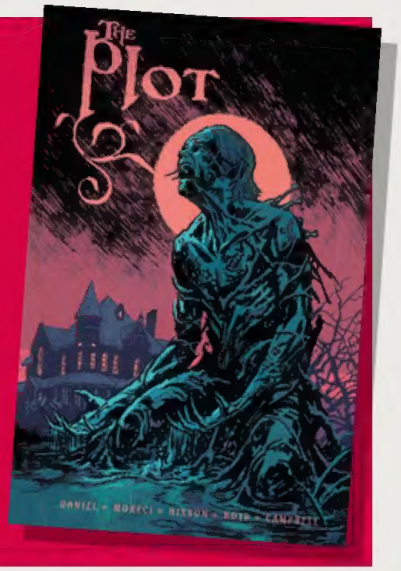
X, Y, Z (IQBAL A)

Iqbal Ali's output weaves together sci-fi, fantasy, detective, horror and more, but always with an emphasis on characters. His greatest strengths come into play in x, y, z, a comic that utilises racism and youthful isolation as a metaphor for some determinedly weird, otherworldly drama. Beautifully drawn by Aleksander Bozic, whose vigorous detailing cements x, y, z in a warped flavour of reality, Ali's and his 2019 graphic novel is a muscular and fearsome character study.

ZOOT! #3 (HOTEL FRED PRESS)

Roger Langridge's annual anthology of strips featuring his characters like Fred the Clown, Art D'Ecco and The Hump et. al. has been a perennial small press favourite, but this new issue seems to have really stepped up a level. It's still packed with the outrageous humour and anarchic spirit which we loved in previous volumes, but this issue is framed with a series of stories about Roger's insomnia which sees him link the various strips together in a half asleep state. It means the whole thing hangs together beautifully and gives a superbly simple structure for the eclectic stories to hang off.

THE PLOT VOL. 1 (VAULT COMICS)



It's been a stellar year for Vault Comics in 2019, with plenty of mentions in this run-down already, however The Plot is the best of the bunch. A pair of teenagers go and live with their uncle after the murder of their parents by a mysterious Swamp Thing like creature. Instead of going somewhere normal, they go to live in the creepy family house, which has plenty secrets to hide – from family secrets to creepy haunted basements.

It's a classic slice of creepy Gothic horror which feels like a lost Stephen King novel, yet is told with a super stylish Bronze Age style that makes it feel like a lost Vertigo book from the late 80s.

Co-writers Tim Daniels and Michael Moreci brilliantly tease mystery after mystery in this tense and intriguing series, while the vintage artwork makes it feel as dark and murky as it's enigmatic villain. It took something really special to stand out from Vault's incredible line-up this year, but The Plot manages to do that by creating a slice of timeless, unsettling, creepy horror.

PUBLISHER SPOTLIGHT

"One of Scotland's most exciting and diverse indie publishers"

Alex Thomas takes a look at the best of **BHP Comics**

The next in our series of publisher spotlights shines a light on Scotland's BHP Comics.

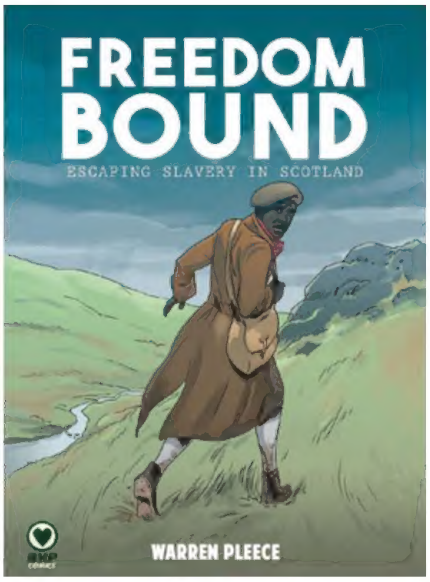
Beginning life as 'Black Hearted Press' in the early 2010s, publisher Sha Nazir combined forces with writer John Farman and artist Dave Braysher to release their first book, Black Maria. As John and Dave went their separate ways, Sha continued releasing comics, under the Bold Hearted Press moniker, from his own book Laptop guy, through to zines like The Mighty Women of Science. He also began to pick up work from established names like John Wagner and Alan Grant, as well as Scottish small press stars like Gary Chudleigh (Plagued) and even big names like Frank Quitely. An integral part of the Glasgow Comic Con, Sha and his team have evolved BHP from a company who released other people's work, to publishers of their own books such as women of colour anthology Full Colour. Along the way they have become one of Scotland's most exciting indie publishers.

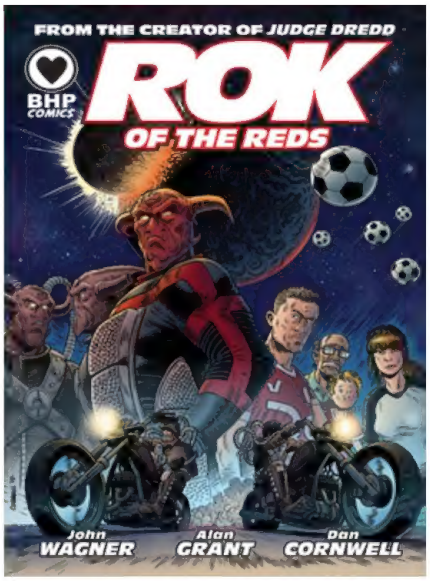
Rok of The Reds

The book which first brought BHP to our attention saw Judge Dredd co-creators John Wagner and Allan Grant bring us a tale of an alien warlord who comes to earth and assumes the role of a troubled footballer. It's like Roy of The Rovers meets War of the Worlds, and is a slice of classic all ages comics.

Freedom Bound

Along with Full Colour, Freedom Bound represents a fantastic example of positive publishing intent from BHP. A collection of stories about slavery in Scotland (an unlikely combination to say the least) and thanks to it's mix of historical detail and thoughtful story telling this book was introduced to Scottish schools to work as both education and entertainment.





You can pick up these books and more at bhpcomics.squarespace.com

Killtopia

As a result of it's barnstorming success on Kickstarter, Dave Cook and Craig Paton's Killtopia was picked up by BHP and helped boost it's profile to become one of our best indie comics of 2018. A super slick dystopian thriller featuring killer mechs and freedom fighters it reads like Akira meets 2000 AD but with super slick videogame aesthetic.

Rolled A One

Following the success of Killtopia, BHP started 2019 by announcing plans to re-release this gem of a book from Space Captain creator Chris Baldie (along with a re-issue of Colin Bell and Neil Slorance's Dungeon Fun). A tale of a group of geeks bonding over table top gaming is a wonderful mix of fantasy and friendship. from one of Scotland's most exciting indie creators.

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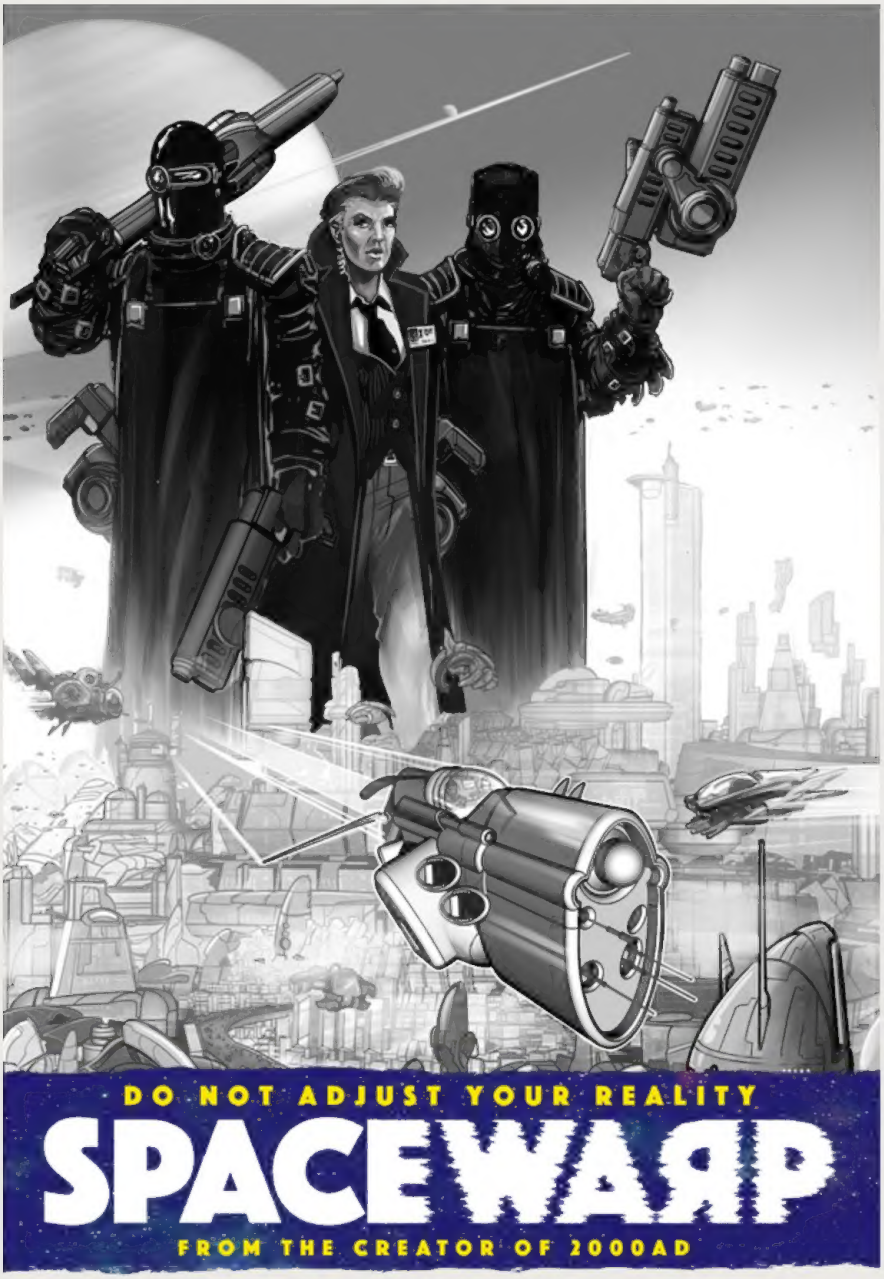
"We've paid a terrible price for comics 'growing up' and for deserting our young readers"

William Procter talks to **Pat Mills** about new anthology **Space Warp**



For the majority of British Comics readers, Pat Mills is a house-hold name. As one of the architects of the 1970s British Comics Renaissance, Mills was a key figure in establishing fondly remembered titles Tammy, Battle, Action, Misty, and of course, the long-running 2000AD. As well as being one of the creative engines that drove 2000AD 'sister' title, Crisis (perhaps the most politically radical comic in British history), Revolver, and the brilliantly bonkers Toxic!, (featuring the joyfully brutal escapades of Marshal Law). It's little wonder, then, that Pat is described affectionately as 'the Godfather of British Comics'.

It's safe to say that Pat Mills has never really slowed down since those halcyon days when his boundless creative energy gave us many instantly-recognizable characters and stories. Judge Dredd, Sláine, Nemesis the Warlock, Ro-Busters, ABC Warriors, Bill Savage, and many more. Now, Pat is back with his latest project, a new anthology comic titled Spacewarp, a sci-fi anthology comic, harking back to those heady days when Pat's offspring was in its prime.

Spacewarp isn't a 'rip-off' of 2000AD, rather it is intended to be a British science fiction comic for the 21st century, not simply a nostalgia trip for the 40-plus generation.

Over the past thirty years or so, the British Comics landscape has changed dramatically, so much so that it would be fair to say that the medium has been left in poor health

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SPACEWARP IS SPACE COPS! KILLER ROBOTS! MUTANT SECRET AGENTS! AND MUCH MORE!
62 MORE. 62 REALITIES. 1 POLICE FORCE!
SF1
JURASSIC PUNX
SLAYER
MEET SCHLOCK!
ONE ROBOT AGAINST A MILLION SPACE KNIGHTS!
HELLBREAKER
FUTANT
STAY WARPED!
SPACEWARPCOMIC.COM
FREE FUTURE SCHLOCK
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WARP MERCH!
6 DNA-WARPING STORIES
SPACEWARP THE COMIC WITH SCHLOCK 'N AARGH!

SpaceWarp features 6 new stories written by Mills that feature "strong story-telling, lots of action, lots of deaths and not too much chat"

since the collapse of the juvenile market in the late-80s/ early-90s. Readers will probably have their own fond memories of the period as one where shelves in the local news-agents seemed to buckle beneath the weight of so many paper treasures. Of course, there are a few survivors of the British comics apocalypse: The Beano, Commando, 2000AD and its spin-off, Judge Dredd: The Megazine, remain ubiquitous, if not as widely read as in the past (although many have gone through what Mills describes as a "counter-cultural cleansing"). The children's comic, however, is more impoverished than it's ever been. Look in any newsagents, and you'll see a wave of infantile, puerile titles based largely on existing franchises, their covers splattered with free gifts and garish ephemera. It certainly seems that children in the 1970s and 80s were treated more intelligently.

There are several provocative ideas fuelling Spacewarp's inaugural flight. Firstly, tapping into young readers and their appetite for dramatic, thought-provoking stories is very much high on the agenda. "I was very aware that comics today are not in a good place," explains Mills. "And in particular, they've lost their young readership. So, arguably, there's not that many people under the age of 25, or even 30 who regularly read British comics. Meanwhile, graphic novels and that sort go from strength to strength. If you consider that comics started with kids, then that's where they really need to come back to."

Mills continues: "As I've said before, we've paid a truly terrible commercial price for comics 'growing up' and for deserting our original young readers. They didn't walk away from us, we walked away from them and that was a huge mistake. I believe that, like James Bond or Doctor Who, popular culture comics like 2000AD should appeal to young and old. So, Spacewarp is an attempt to reverse some of the damage and show that it is still possible to reach a wide rather than supposedly 'elite' audience. It aims to avoid either being too sophisticated or too young. Spacewarp is about putting the readers first."

Doing it for the kids

Capturing the broadest possible reader demographics is surely a delicate balancing act, and one which US publishers like DC and Marvel, have struggled to achieve since the 1970s. No doubt Pat's decades of experience in managing that symmetry will be crucial, but equally important is the feedback from readers that has been "drummed into me over the years." In Mills' estimation, readers want "clear storytelling, strong science fiction, fantasy and occult themes, great modern heroes, lots of action, lots of deaths, not too much chat, an element of mischief, subversion, and an anti-authority stance, plus some dark humour. In essence, they want Schlock and Awe!"

By the same token, it is important not to have "confusing lay-outs where you need an 'O' level in comics to figure out what picture to look at next." That's certainly a mighty menu of genre dishes to cook without spoiling the broth, but if anyone has the necessary culinary experience to bake a delectable feast of comics nutrition, then Pat Mills is the person to do it.

What can readers expect from Spacewarp, then? For a start, all the stories are written by Mills, with new and upcoming artists providing the visuals. Perhaps more importantly, Spacewarp is a creator-owned enterprise, meaning that each of the artists have "a major stake in THEIR comic and [Mills] wants that to translate to the readers too". The sharing of intellectual property rights and royalties is a direct symptom of Mills' views on British comics publishers. "From a personal point-of-view," emphasizes Mills, "the idea is to break the outmoded pyramid shape of power" that has impacted the medium in the UK for decades. None of the artists have been paid yet, so there's certainly a lot riding on the first issue, which contains 60-plus pages, comprising "six comic strips

Produced in association with Pipedream Comics
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with accompanying features to make them an immersive experience." In many ways, Spacewarp may be a warning shot across the bow of the industry, and if it works, it might very well change the course of comics publishing for the better.

Each story is approximately ten pages long, breaking with the traditional anthology format of three-to-six-pages. One of the marked differences from other British anthology comics is that all the stories in Spacewarp exist within a shared universe, something that Mills wanted to try with 2000AD but couldn't achieve, for whatever reason. The stories "are hero-focused, self-contained and interlocking in the Spacewarp Universe. Thanks to the efforts of the sinister Alien Warp Lords, watching Earth from their Sfeer, an eversion planet, endlessly turning itself inside out, Reality is breaking down and our heroes face a variety of science fiction threats on their respective Earths. In each case, a Space, Time of Dimensional Warp, engineered by the Warp Lords, is responsible. Led by the Alien robot Schlock, our heroes are working towards their shared talents and powers to defeat the Warp Lords.'

Schlock and Aaargh!

The six stories themselves include: 'Jurassic Punx' ("street fighters versus dinosaurs!", with Bruno Stahl); 'SF-1' ("at war with giant viruses!", with Ade Hughes), 'Xecutioners' ("62 moons, 62 parallel realities, 1 police force", with Gareth Sleighthome); 'Slayer' ("one robot against a million Space Knights!", with James Newell); 'Hellbreaker' ("De La Rue escapes from hell to punish the living!", with Ian Ashcroft) and 'Futant' (a portmanteau of 'future' and 'mutant' with art by Mike Donaldson).
Each of the stories "have unique elements," states Mills excitedly. "For instance, 'Jurassic Punx' is set in post-apocalypse late 1970s Liverpool with striking visuals like the Liver Building and Paddy's Wigwam under attack from dinosaurs! A female time traveller, DaDa Derda, returns home from her journeys through time and space to Liverpool to save her city".

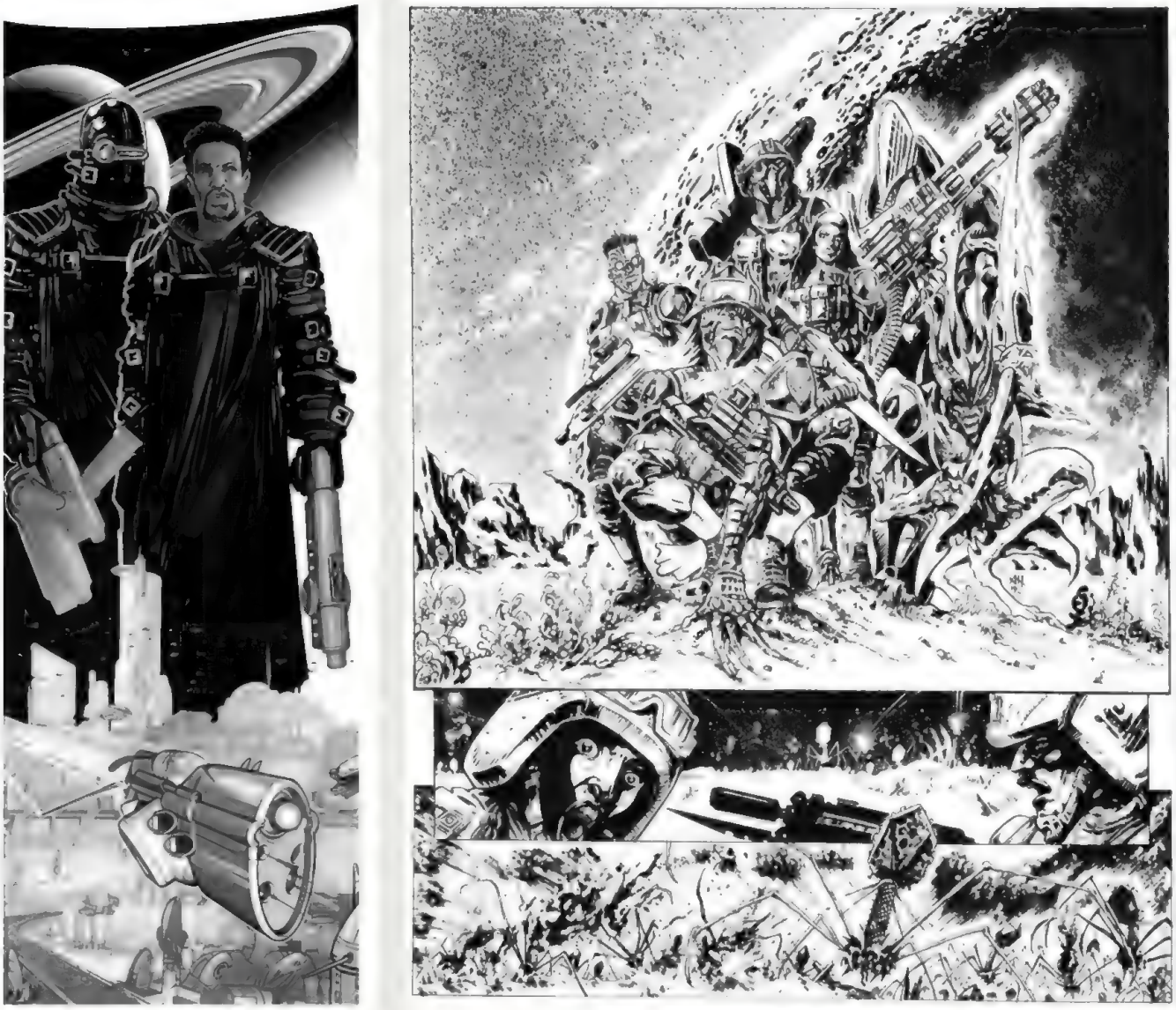
Comics Legend Mills is looking to revitalize the UK comics market for a new generation

The "immersive extras in the comic", and also on the dedicated Spacewarp website, aim to provide a more participatory relationship between creator and reader. Readers will be invited to the website "where if they choose to join the Space Knights on their dubious 'crusade' to colonize and subdue Alien planets, there is a humorous but challenging riposte". There will also be a Space Knight recruitment poster drawn by Spelling Mistakes Costs Lives' Darren Cullen, who produced the Action Man Battlefield Casualties film which attracted the ire of The Daily Mail (the more things change and all that).

Furthermore, the stories in Spacewarp "feature female and male heroes from a wide range of backgrounds and ethnicities", some of whom are core characters like the aforementioned DaDa Derda from 'Jurassic Punx', Salome, a female solider in 'SF-1', Chaval, a black hero from 'Xecutioners,' and a black female supporting character in 'Futant'.

"We need to reflect the world we live in, we want characters our readers can identify with"

Pat is keen to stress, however, that Spacewarp may be intended for all-ages doesn't mean that the stories will be "toned down or young or juvenile in anyway. I've never produced comics like that, and I'm certainly not going to start now." Of course, Pat's reputation for creating working class heroes in stories that contain an anti-establishment bent is well-known. But it is also important to the creators that Spacewarp isn't viewed as a politically-correct 'message' comic for the 'woke' generation. Mills sees the diverse range of characters more as sustaining a tradition that began in the '70s than a desperate appeal to the PC-brigade. "We had a black hero in Action ['Black Jack'], there were black heroes in 2000AD ['Harlem Heroes'], a black female protagonist in Crisis ['Third World War']. Spacewarp has strong females too, not 'girly' like Marvel. At the same time, I'm trying to stay away from cultural posturing and feature characters who are genuine, not comic fakes. This is important because a potential reader in his 20s brought this up with me. He was relieved by my responses. He was a young taxi driver and those are the kinds of readers I want – I'll leave The Guardian luvvies to others".



Space Warp is packed with diverse characters from up and coming artist like Gareth Sleightholme (SF-1) and Ade Hughes (Xecutioners)

There is, however, a recognition that the world has become much more diverse since the 1970s and "we need to really reflect the world we live in—we want characters our readers can identify with. Not traditional white middle class heroes."

On the topic of heroes, Pat Mills wouldn't be Pat Mills if he didn't take the opportunity to criticize the "corporate superheroes" that are currently running riot across the cultural landscape. "Mainstream superheroes have betrayed the word hero," insists Mills. "They've debased and devalued it. It's a violation of meaning. So, we are brainwashed into admiring billionaires who don't stand for good against evil. If we look at their real-life counterparts, there is no question of it. Genuine heroes are ignored. Ordinary people who do extraordinary things. Their achievements don't have to be boring. On the contrary, they're powerful and exciting."

It's not too difficult to extend Mills' views by applying them to the people that have become true, real-life heroes in the war against COVID-19—not politicians like Messrs. Johnson and Trump, or billionaires like Bruce Wayne, but nurses and doctors combating the virus on the front-line (in the trenches, one might say).

Will Spacewarp be a regular publication or is this a one-off? That all depends on whether the experiment pays off (and in many ways, it is an experiment). But plans are already in place for a second issue. "Phase Two will be some months later. I see our phases like seasons in an ongoing TV drama series, where there is, typically, 8 months between each series appearing." In the meantime, readers should ready themselves for an interstellar comics experience for the 21st century.

Spacewarp is expected to be released digitally in June 2020, followed by a paper release in September (TBC). For more information, visit Millsverse.com

Hilda and the Mountain King

Publisher: Flying Eye Books
Writer/Artist: Luke Pearson
Price: £16.99 from nobrow.net

For the past few years, Luke Pearson's Hilda books have been a hidden gem within the comics world, that only an enlightened few seemed to be aware of. However with our favourite blue haired troll botherer now having a hit animated series on Netflix, it seem that the whole world is getting in on the act. And so what better time for Pearson to release a new volume of Scandi scampery.

For those not in the know, Hilda is a young girl who lives with her mother, and half deer half fox pet Twig, in the city of Trollberg (which is a kind of contemporary Scandi city filled with mystical creatures). At the end of the last volume (Hilda and the Stone Forest), she found herself turned into a troll and whisked from her home back to the troll forest. This new volume picks up the action immediately after this switch and sees Hilda attempting to escape the mountain kingdom and return home to her mother. While her bewildered Mum attempts to cope with a baby troll now living in her house.

While Hilda books all have this relentless energy and enthusiasm for life, Hilda and The Mountain King is backed up with a real emotional depth, thanks to the glorious relationship between Hilda and her mother. While in previous volumes this has been strained (as her mother attempted to curb her daughter's more outrageous antics) the realisation that neither can manage without the other really tugs at the heart strings. Which gives Hilda and the Mountain King one of the most wonderful emotional cores that any of the Hilda books have managed so far.

"Densely panelled pages make every spread a glorious and frenetic delight that draws you in"

Alongside this wonderful relationship is the usual incredible artwork and glorious characterisation that we have come to know and love with the Hilda books. The characters are top drawer, especially the bizarre trolls and craggy mountain king. Pearson's style evokes memories of classic Scandi books like the Moomins, along with the expressive style of European comics and the wistfulness of a Studio Ghibli animation. It is also dripping with contemporary cool thanks to a paired back colour scheme which make it feel like the ultimate in hipster comic book chic.

Pearson's' densely panelled pages make every spread a glorious and frenetic delight that draws you into Hilda's world effortlessly and once you are in you won't ever want to escape. Hilda and The Mountain Kind is another slice of comic perfection, and if this is your first journey to the world of Trollberg, then it won't be your last!

Internet Crusader

Publisher: Avery Hill Publishing
Writer/Artist: George Wylesole
Price: £14.99 from averyhillpublishing.bigcartel.com

For his follow up to last year's Ghosts Etc. cartoonist George Wylesole begins with a series of pages that look like screengrabs from a 90s computer desktop, but which have been meticulously redrawn. It's full of pop up ads, chat screens and vintage icons which will make geeks of a certain age swell with nostalgia.

After a few pages, you begin to see a story is playing out in the chat windows and email subject fields, which follows a geeky teen getting hacked after trying to download something he shouldn't and gets more than he bargained for - as do his family and friends in the real world!

Thanks to this unique approach to story telling, Internet Crusader is unlike anything else you'll read this year. While that originality makes for an incredible experience, it's not always an easy read. The pages are quite over whelming in places, which gets even more intense when the virus hits and takes over. Fortunately a mid issue video game challenge sees Wylesole break things up and deliver a brilliant mix of vintage visuals and more obvious action.

We often say books deserve multiple readings but in Internet Crusader's case it is imperative, as it's likely you won't really get to grips with the story until half way through. So revisiting those early pages is essential in order to make sense of what is going on.

When you've finally got your head around it, Internet Crusader is a fantastically complex and uniquely original read, that really pushes the boundaries of sequential story telling. And will make you never want to talk to a mystery Instant Messenger again!

Mimi and The Wolves

Publisher: Avery Hill Publishing
Writer/Artist: Alabaster Pizzo
Price: £14.99 from averyhillpublishing.bigcartel.com

Collecting together the first 3 volumes of Alabaster Pizzo's acclaimed self published series, Mimi and The Wolves sees a young mouse get mixed up in a dark world of wolves and the occult, after being plagued by mysterious dream about the enigmatic Holy Venus.

On the surface, Mimi And The Wolves looks like a fun mix of cutesy animal comic and supernatural mythology, thanks to Pizzo's sublimely simple artwork. But underneath that facade is an epic slow burning story of self discovery, that juxtaposes the adorable world of Mimi with the darker elements of the wolves' – especially their rituals, carnivorous ways and the toxic relationships they expect Mimi to accept. With it's central theme of a doomed journey of self discovery, it's a book that can be read in a number of ways, depending on your own life experiences. But overall it's another fascinating and thought provoking read from Avery Hill that is a lot more substantial than it's cute exterior would suggest.

Vanni

Publisher: New Internationalist
Writer: Benjamin Dix
Artist: Lindsay Pollock
Price: £16.59 from Amazon

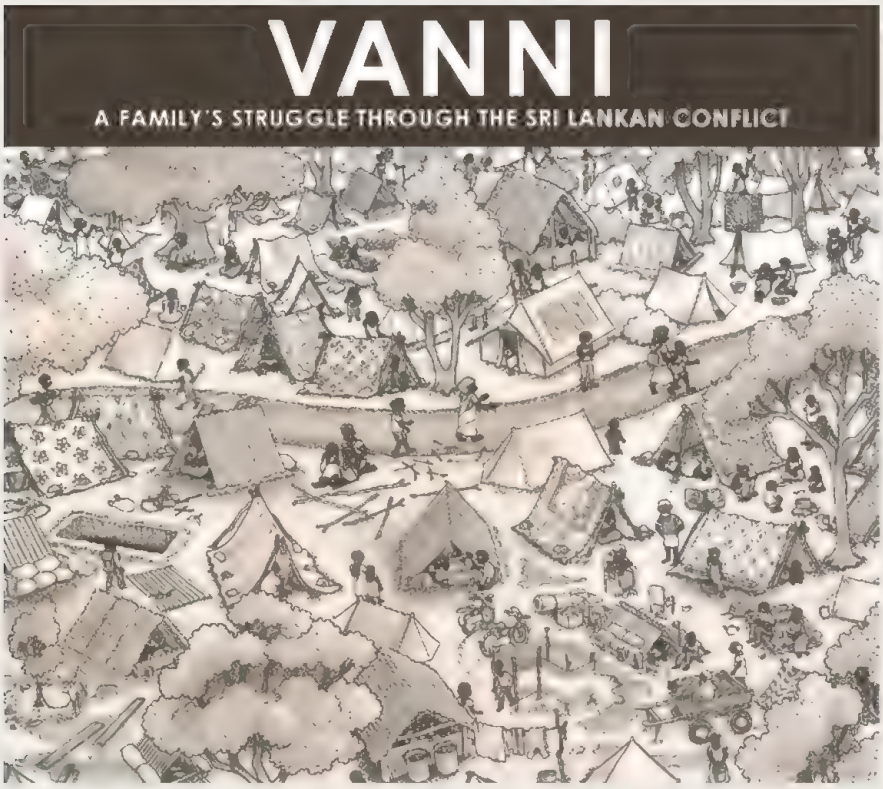
A powerful graphic novel which looks at the civil war in Sri Lanka that occurred in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami. It follows two families as they attempt to survive in their devastated homeland, moving from camp to camp where they are supposed to be safe, but losing family and friends along the way – some to bullets and bombs, others to enforced recruitment into the army.

Benjamin Dix and Lindsay Pollack's graphic novel is a potent and emotive look at the affect modern warfare has on the population of the country in which war is fought. While the story is not a 'true story' it is an amalgamation of accounts which Dix collected during his time working for the UN and interviews with those who survived and sought refuge in the UK and beyond.

By combining all these elements into one account, it allows Dix and Pollack to tell a very deliberate, detail heavy story, in which they get across the points they need to about the atrocities these people went through. But also they are able to build well rounded characters with believable relationships which make you care about what they go through.

While Dix handles the story with subtlety and intelligence, Pollack's artwork brings the story to life thanks to a sublime mix of pencil line and grey watercolour washes. The greyscale colour scheme does a wonderful job of balancing the personal moments with the horrors of war and the devastation of the tsunami without relying on an obvious colour palette.

While the Sri Lankan Civil war may not be on everyone's radar Vanni is the kind of graphic novel which brings attention to it in a very accessible and impactful way. A thought-provoking and beautifully told story, this is an extraordinary piece of work that deserves the utmost praise!



Delver

Publisher: ComiXology Originals
Writer: MK Reed, C. Spike Trotman,
Artist: Clive Hawken
Price: £1.99/$2.99 at ComiXology

The latest from ComiXology's Originals stable tells the story of a young girl whose simple farming life changes forever when her family discovers a magic door leading to mysterious dungeon, which brings with it treasure hunting 'Delvers'.

With her home being misused by these visitors, our heroine sets off into the dungeon in search of riches to save her family. All of which makes for a really interesting premise for a story, but one with a relatively slow pace in the opening issues.

Once the story gets going, and we enter the dungeon, things pick up, and our heroine Temerity develops from being a fairly blank slate into an embittered soul aggrieved by what is happening to her home – especially it's misuse by unwanted visitors and it's corruption by magic. This makes the character very relate-able, in a way not often seen in fantasy comics and make for a really engaging read as a result.

Packed full of colourful characters, bizarre creatures and light-hearted adventure, Delver is a series which is definitely worth digging into.

"I always think: how can I make The Artist's life more horrible?"

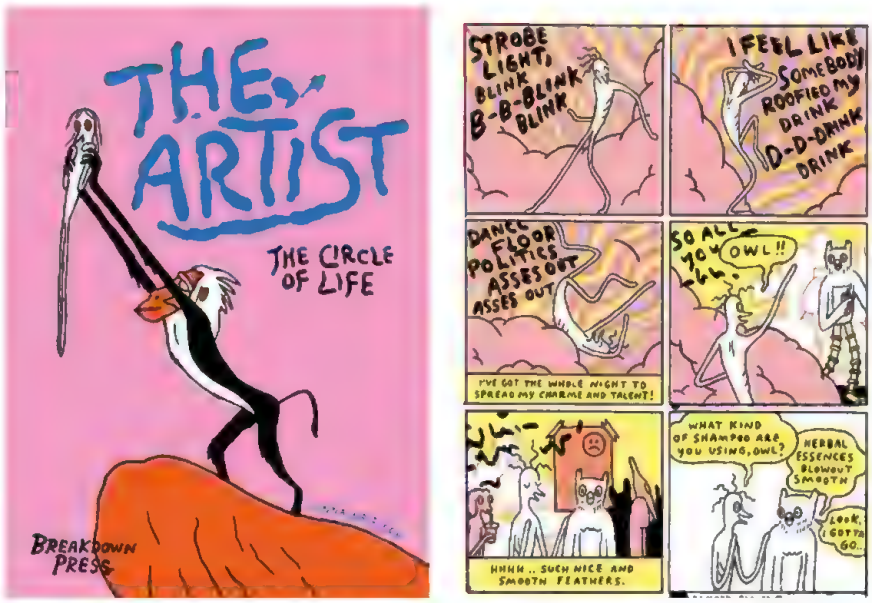
Anna Haifisch on her motivation for **The Artist: The Circle of Life**

Anna Haifisch's comic strip The Artist, has become a small press favourite thanks to its series of evocative stories about a suffering for your art. She is back with a new collection of strips, starring her bird like muse, and we asked her what we can look forward to in The Artist: Circle of Life:

You're releasing a new collection of The Artist – has the character changed or evolved?
Anna Haifisch: Not yet! He is going to be very successful in the 3rd volume. I am working on it right now. But for the 2nd book he didn't change much. It's only his hair which he grew out. He is the same miserable artist as he is in the first book. There are just more awful things happening to him.

The strips feel quite personal, are they based on your own experiences of being a struggling artist?
AF: None of the episodes are autobiographic. Some of the stories are taken from my own or my friends' experiences. But I am exaggerating a lot while I am writing and drawing the episodes. I always think: how can I make The Artist's life more horrible? Often I feel like a sadist, because I love him a lot.

Why did you choose to represent the artist as a bird?
AF: I wanted the character to be fragile and frail. Birds are both. His father is a crane and his mother is a swan. Both are birds with long limbs. That makes The Artist extremely flexible and bendable. It's fun to draw him.


THE ARTIST
THE CIRCLE OF LIFE
BREAKDOWN PRESS
STROBE LIGHT, BLINK B-B-BLINK BLINK
I FEEL LIKE SOMEBODY ROOFIED MY DRINK D-D-DRINK DRINK
DANCE FLOOR POLITICS ASSES OUT ASSES OUT
I'VE GOT THE WHOLE NIGHT TO SPREAD MY CHARME AND TALENT!
OWL!!
WHAT KIND OF SHAMPOO ARE YOU USING, OWL?
HERBAL ESSENCES BLOWOUT SMOOTH
LOOK, I GOTTA GO.
HHHH .. SUCH NICE AND SMOOTH FEATHERS.
As well as seeing the artist suffer in the fine art world he also struggles in small press

What inspired you to start telling stories about a struggling artist?
AF: I often find drama amusing. And being an artist is quite dramatic. It is the perfect breeding ground for stories that are funny and sad at the same time. Also I love to play around with old fashioned artist myths.

Do you find your comics appeal to fellow artists who recognise their own struggles in the stories?
AF: When the series was weekly on Vice.com I got a lot of responses from readers who found themselves in his place or who wanted to give him a meal. I think lots of them weren't artists themselves. The feeling of being a failure seems to be universal.

You seem to give the character a sense of optimism is it important to add some humour to the book?
AF: Oh, of course! I don't want to depress anybody. Also being an artist can be very great, despite economic threats. I really don't want to keep anybody away from choosing this path. I think that every good or even sad story needs a bit of humour in it. That's my duty as the creator.

The Artist: Circle of Life is available for £16.99 from Breakdown Press

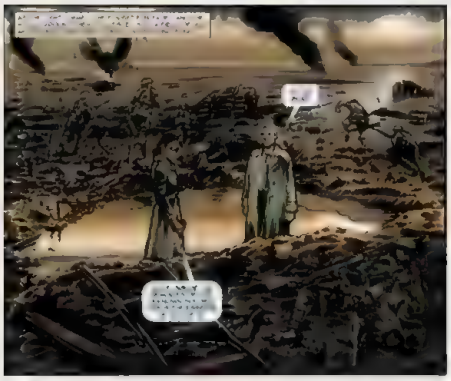
"It's all about trying to capture the spirit of Warrior rather than a slavish re-invention."

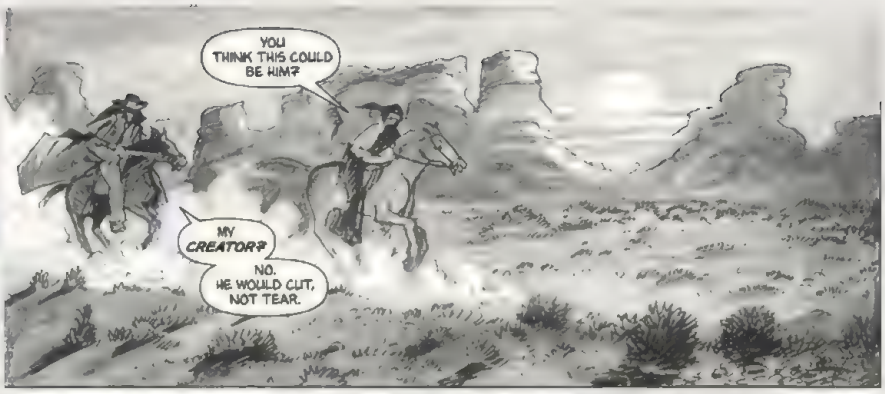
Steve Tanner on the inspirations for new anthology **Brawler**

Warrior, the 80s anthology which brought us V For Vendetta and Miracleman has inspired a generation of UK creators. None more so than TimeBomb Comics' Steve Tanner. With his new anthology Brawler he is looking to recapture the energy and originality of Warrior. With the first issue debuting at the Portsmouth Comic Convention, we caught up with Steve to find more about Brawler!

Your new anthology is inspired by Warrior, why do you think the world needs a new comic like that?
Steve Tanner: The idea was Jason Cobley's. Last October he posted on social media ruminating on how much he missed Warrior and that it was a shame there wasn't anything like it around these days – I messaged him straight away saying "You're right. Let's do it." So we did. There was a bit more back and forth from that point of course, both of us had similar but not exacting ideas so there was some alignment needed, but it was all about trying to capture that spirit of Warrior rather than any slavish re-invention.

What was it about Warrior that people look back on so fondly?
ST: Warrior was a character driven anthology which was something very familiar to readers of British weekly comics, but also creator owned, which wasn't. It was hugely influential, and brought some key comic creators to the attention of a wider audience.





The first issue includes some established characters like Amnesia Agents and Frankenstein Texas along with new work.

Dan Whitehead and David Hitchcock's Frankenstein Texas joins Steve's Major Rakhana

It didn't last long, but while it did it burned brightly. Our Brawler cover design really pays homage to Warrior I think, but designer James Gray has very cleverly managed to come up with a layout that seems to trigger the memories of those that are familiar with Warrior without confusing those unaware of a title that hasn't been published for almost forty years.

There's s a fantastic mix of creators, how did you select your line up?

ST: Jason had a couple of names, I suggested a couple more, and then we asked them to pitch and considered each one. Tonally, we wanted great genre stories so we targeted writers we knew could deliver that, and artists who really understood sequential storytelling. A key part of the final selection process was to be sure that each of the ideas pitched had a strong central character concept – there's no "lead" strip in Brawler. All of the stories could be, and all feature characters that can stand perfectly well on their own, in their own titles.

Brawler features familiar stories, such as Frankenstein Texas and Amnesia Agents, why include them?

ST: As with the original Warrior we feature new stories about characters that have appeared elsewhere side-by-side with brand new creations. But it was also being aware that there was existing fanbase for the characters and their creators, and the tone and style of those concepts fitted Brawler perfectly. Frankenstein, Texas was one of my favourite comics of 2018 – so having a new Frankenstein story appear ticks a massive box for me. Also, it's the only story that we knew would be kept in black and white because, well, David Hitchcock!

This feels like quite a departure from your work on Flintlock, do you enjoy creating comics in different genres?

ST: Well, not too much of a departure for me creatively. My story in Brawler #1, Major Rakhana, introduces a female lead, and a historically steampunk genre – so I don't think I've wandered too far off the path, there!

How regularly is this going to be released?

ST: The first issue was always a test, really, to see if there's an audience for Brawler. I've a meeting scheduled with Jason Cobley at Portsmouth Comic Con and there's only one item on the agenda: Brawler #2! We're not going to be monthly, and even quarterly might be a stretch – but I've already shuffled my schedule around to allow for future Brawler releases.

You can pick up Brawler #1 along with Steve's other titles at timebombcomics.com/shop

Test #1-3

Publisher: Vault Comics
Writer: Christopher Sebela
Artist: Jen Hickman, Harry Saxon, Hassan Otsmane-Elhaou
Price: £2.49 from ComiXology

The latest from High Crimes' Christopher Sebela is a cyberpunk mystery that follows a technologically altered young woman on a search for meaning in the mysterious town of Laurelwood.

Test is a book that is built around questions. From the moment we meet our heroine Aleph in the front of the cab of a truck as she hitch-hikes across the US in search of a high tech Shangri-la, we are questioning who she is, where she is going and what this world is all about.

The characters' constant searching for answers in Test is an interesting way to tell a story and certainly works well for the genre. The concept of 'a girl with a secret' goes to a 'small American town, with an even bigger secret' is one we've seen plenty of times before, reminding us of Psycho and Twin Peaks but also The Prisoner. It also has a very Warren Ellis feel with its use of forward thinking technology that interacts with the human body.

A bit like its Vault Comics stable-mate, Friendo, Test is a book which is going to require time and effort to really get into. It's an ambitious story, packed full of clever ideas and told in a really interesting way, however it is not one which gives immediate gratification or resolution. We are only just beginning to get a glimpse of what is happening, but based on these first issues Test is a book worth trying out.

Resonant

Publisher: Vault Comics
Writer: David Andry
Artist: Alejandro Aragon
Price: £2.49 at ComiXology

Also joining the ever expanding Vault Comics roster is Resonant, the story of a young girl's mission to protect her siblings while their father, , travels for help in a deadly future.

Writer, David Andry has produced a stellar story that is immensely engrossing as you find yourself struggling to put it down, thanks to the incredible levels of thought put into every aspect of this tale and the world it inhabits. From the incredibly realistic family dynamic to the mysterious Chirpers and the rules surrounding the mysterious waves, reading, Resonant feels like a cross between many of the best apocalyptic comics (especially the Walking Dead), however, this in no way a cheap knock off. Andry has imbued the title with so much heart and mystery that it stand on it's own.

The artistic team of Alejandro Aragon, Jason Wordie and Deron Bennett offer equally impressive work to enhance this wonderful title. Aragon's scratchy and expressive artwork really conveys a lot of the story in a very unique fashion, while the colours and lettering help it to create a really unique vibe.

This is another future classic from Vault, as Andry and co. fill this book with a deep sense of intrigue and beauty which quickly becomes horrific and terrifying. But either way will be incredibly captivating for readers, who'll be wanting more by the end.

Warpaint

Publisher: Witchworld Limited
Writer: Kev Sherry
Artist: Katia Vecchio
Price: £5.49 from ComiXology

Warpaint reads like a classic Stephen King coming-of-age story or a John Hughes brat pack movie, but set in the modern day with female leads.

It follows the trials and tribulations of a group of young school girls who come into conflict with the school bully and an out of touch teacher and decide to make their point in a most unlikely manner - by using their menstrual blood as warpaint.

Writer Sherry and artist Vecchio have created a smartly conceived and thought provoking read about young women finding their place in the world. While it uses classic coming of age conventions, it also mixes in some supernatural elements alongside very believable and relate-able characters to make a really compelling story.

At it's core is firebrand Selene the best friend you wish you had at school, until they go too far and lead you astray.

While it may be a challenging read for some, this is a really powerful comic that should inspire young people everywhere.

"It's a story that's going to pull the rug out from under readers' feet at multiple points"

John Lees on the mysteries behind new IDW series **Mountainhead**

Part of a series of exciting creator owned series from IDW Publishing, comes Mountainhead, by Sink writer John Lees and artist Ryan Lee. With it's mix of horror and mystery, we caught up with John to find out more about the meaning behind his multi-faceted new series:

Tell us a bit about the world of Mountainhead and what inspired it?
John Lees: The story was drawn together from various elements. The character of Abraham Stubbs has been in my head for years, right down to his name. I drew from a couple of real-life stories that had a big impact on me, and combined them with some original elements to create this conflicted young man and his father, Noah. But while the character felt rich and alive to me, I didn't have a suitably compelling story to use him in, and so the concept went on the shelf.

Later, I developed the story of the town of Braeriach and the mysterious events that unfold there, and thought it could make for a visually striking narrative. But the story felt hollow because it wasn't anchored in character, the characters I had feeling merely like vehicles driven by the plot than fully-formed figures. And then I remembered Abraham on the shelf, a character without a story to go with my story without a character, and I was taken aback by how well these two elements clicked together once I combined them, each enhancing the other so well that you'd think they were always meant to be paired.

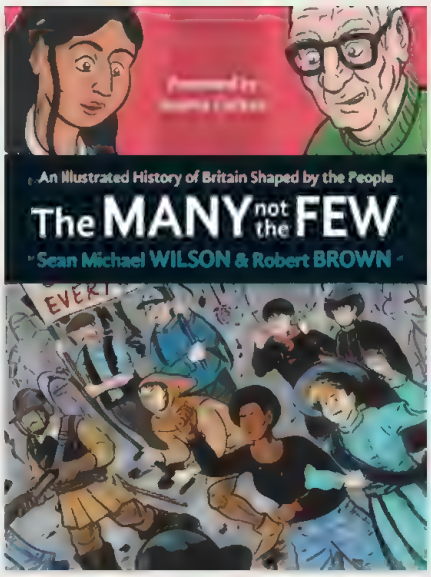
Mountainhead sees burglar Noah and his son Abraham, get more than the expected

There is a key moment in issue #1, how important is it for readers to avoid spoilers to make the most?
JL: Taking readers on a journey is what we all want to do, in one way or another. That journey can be pleasant or funny or sad or frightening, but I think a good story crafts that sense of a shared experience. And for stories like Mountainhead, I think an important element of enjoying that journey is surprise.

Mountainhead is a story that is going to pull the rug out from under readers' feet at multiple points, not just in issue #1, and I think the best way to experience it is to go in knowing as little as possible. It's certainly made writing solicits for each issue a challenge!

For those who are new to your work, which other books should people check out?
JL: For years, And Then Emily Was Gone was the work I was best known for, and Ryan and I have both talked about Mountainhead playing like a spiritual successor to that comic. But more recently, Sink has become my signature work.

You can purchase Mountainhead #1 from ComiXology for £2.49



The Many Not The Few

Publisher: New Internationalist
Writer: Sean Michael Wilson
Artist: Robert Brown
Price: £9.99 from Amazon.co.uk

A look at the history of working class protest in the UK, The Many Not The Few covers key events like the peasants revolt, the Chartists and suffragettes up to the miners strikes of the 80s and even Brexit.

Told in an anecdotal style between a grandfather and his 20-something granddaughter it feels more like the Princess Bride than a left wing polemic. It's a bright and breezy look at events that have shaped the labour movement and the tone feels like you are sat in the room listening to a chat rather than a lecture – although the bonhomie can feel a tad forced.

The artwork from Robert Brown gives the book a further lightness of touch. He is able to balance the gravity of key historical moments with the simple moments of two characters speaking by altering this styles subtly to create a really interesting mix.

Whatever your political viewpoint, this is a brilliant slice of contemporary history, told in a really enjoyable and approachable manner.

Maggie Garrisson

Publisher: SelfMadeHero
Writer: Lewis Trondheim
Artist: Stéphane Oiry
Price: £14.99 from SelfMadeHero

Lewis Trondheim and Stéphane Oiry give us a French perspective on the classic English murder mystery.

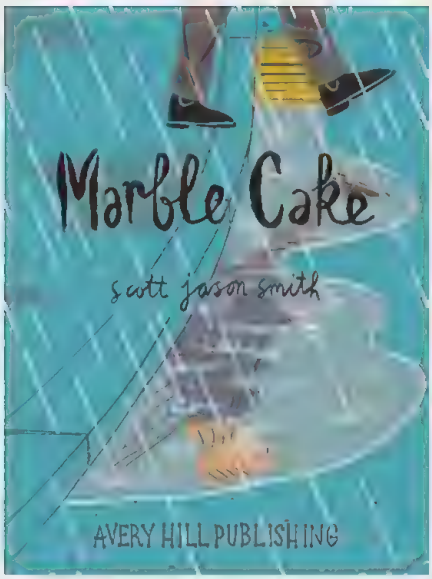
Barely a day into her new role as the PA to an ineffectual PI, our heroine's boss is savagely beaten. Rather than run scared, Maggy dives in to solve the mystery and embarks on a chancy caper which sees her embroiled in the shady underworld of London.

Lewis Trondheim's writing keeps you on tenterhooks throughout as this enjoyable tale twists and turns between characters and locations.

While Stéphane Oiry does a great job of capturing the colours of England. He goes to the greatest of detail – from high street shops to train franchise and ambulance liveries.

The palette is fantastic and captures the mood in each scene brilliantly. Oiry manages to make quite a dark tale feel somewhat light hearted with his choices of colour.

Throughout this fantastic graphic novel, you are left wondering not only about how the story will end but also reflecting a little on twenty first century living and what it entails both on a personal and community level.



Marble Cake

Publisher: Avery Hill Publishing
Writer/Artist: Scott Jason Smith
Price: £11.99 from Avery Hill

Scott Jason Smith's debut graphic novel starts in a disabled loo where our heroine pontificates on buying shoes online and how this is her favourite place to think. It's not every comic that starts like this, but it sets the tone for this surreal mix of the mundane and metaphysical

Once she finished her trip to the loo, Marble Cake follows SuperSmart cashier Tracey and the strange mix of characters she encounters - from her boss with a troubled homelife, to the jogger she fancies and more.

While none of these characters sound like the kind of people you would build a book around, Smith celebrates the mundanity of their every day life and makes their quirky little nuances the subject of his story as they interact and overlap.

With an emphasis on the repetitive nature of modern life this is represented by a rigid six panel grid, which gives everything a real formality. While hand written lettering makes it feel personal and diary like. If you are looking for a character driven, hipster soap opera that revels in the mundanity of the world then Marble Cake is for you.

"Dark, sexy, cyber-noir, hard-boiled, black, erotic, and uncompromising"

Rik Rawling and **Noel Hannan** sum up **Streetmeat**

Set in a dystopian world of grunge and ultra violence, Rik Rawling and Noel Hannan's classic 90s small press series Streetmeat get a 21st century retrospective. We find out more.

You are bringing back Streetmeat, what has brought this on and what can fans look forward to?
Rik Rawling: This book brings together all the material published in the 1990's. That's Books 1 & 2 of Streetmeat, the Solo spin-off book (short strips and fiction, set in the 'Streetmeat' world of Seattle 2020, together with an art gallery featuring some big name contributions), and - just for this special edition - a 20-page taster for what the sequels we'd always planned to do could have looked like.

And what can new fans look forward to if they haven't read it before?
Noel Hannan: Streetmeat has been described in many ways! Dark, sexy, cyber-noir, hard-boiled, black, erotic, uncompromising. If you like a story which moves at a pace, has a strong female lead and reads like a graphic representation of a classic grunge rock track from 1994, Streetmeat should be your choice.
RR: I'd describe it as a cool, dark, violent, sexy Frank Miller, Akira, Lone Wolf and Cub, Scorsese, 2000 AD dystopian mash-up that left me feeling grubby, voyeuristic, anxious and exhilarated all at the same time.

Would you change much if you were making it today?

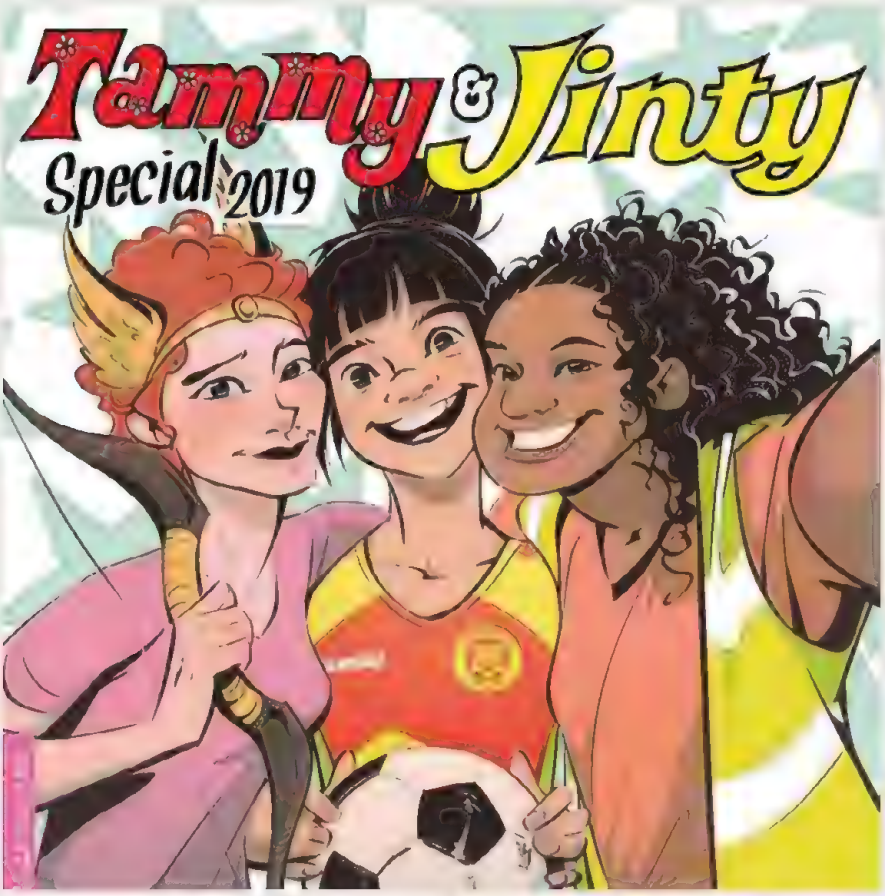
Noel and Rik launched the collected edition of Streetmeat at the Lawless Comic Con

RR: I think we would only change surface detail. Mel's back story is rock solid, and would stand as is no matter what, but we'd probably eschew shower scenes in favour of something more attuned to the present political climate, and the climatic chase scenes at the end would probably involve more clothing.

I'm guilty as charged there, but at the time we didn't have the life experience under our belts and, to be honest, we were probably both hoping it would provoke a response, especially from the target audience which was, at the time, young men of the same age. We're both older and just don't think like the young men we were anymore. Also, I've got a teenage daughter, and would be embarrassed to be cranking out that kind of work now. She would quite rightly disown me.

Any plans to write new chapters? And would you adapt the character at all for a modern audience?
NH Streetmeat 25 as it stands I think is a great testimony to a piece of work Rik and I are immensely proud of from our youth. We have no plans to re-hash Melanoma Solo for a modern audience, however would consider doing a modern updated version if the timing and conditions were right.

You can pick up the new Streemeat collected edition from www.lulu.com



Tammy & Jinty Special

Publisher: Rebellion Publishing
Writer/Artist: Various
Price: £3.99 digital or £4.99 print from shop.2000AD.com

Joining previous revivals like Misty and Scream is the new Tammy and Jinty Special, which is packed full of fantastic female focused stories, and exclusive new work from some of small press' biggest names.

Compared to the more horror focused Misty and Scream, Tammy and Jinty relies on a mix of magic, mystery and science-fiction stories. Also like their weekly fore-bears, this collection features a series of short 3 or 4 page stories that are mix of 'one-and-done's, but with some having the potential to develop into regular series.

Star of the show is Rob Williams and Lisa Henke's Roy of the Rovers spin off, Rocky of the Rovers which is a companion piece to William's re-imagining of the legendary sporting superstar. Rocky is a struggling junior player who lives in her famous relations' shadow, but instead of being a striker she opts to be a defensive midfielder which gives the story a much greater depth, and allows for Williams to tell more complex stories than 'our hero scores in the last minute to win the cup'. It's a bright and energetic read and is a great centre piece if this were to be a regular series.

The remaining stories see a mix of genres and styles from a host of small press stars like Andy Clift,Kate Ashwin, Matt Gibbs, Rachael Smith, Sarah Millman and more, who each bring a unique flavour to their respective stories. More than just a 'comic for girls', this is a fantastic read for all genders, and a reminder of the quality work being produced in the UK comic scene in 2019. We hope is the start of a regular Tammy and Jinty series.

Broken Bear

Publisher: Caliber Comics
Writer: Frankee White
Artist: Adam Markiewicz, A.H.G.
Price: £10 from Good Comics

Broken Bear balance a really classic fantasy feel but with a smart and contemporary edge, thanks to a very intriguing lead.

Selm, the young ward of a powerful ranger known simply as the Bear, makes a Faustian pact with a witch in order to gain her mentor's power and step out of his shadow. Following this betrayal she heads off to the nearest city and there she is drawn into the tyrannical world of local villain Balzur. Can Selm help her new found friends or will she be as dangerous to them as she was to her previous mentor?

Co-creators White and Markiewiz have crafted a really simple story of a girl doing whatever she can to succeed, often at the expense of those around her. It's an interesting inversion of the classic fantasy lead, not just by making her female, but also making her ruthless and often quite unlikeable. Without this strong lead character to build the story around, Broken Bear could be just another generic swords and sorcery tale, but thanks to Selm's unique attitude it gives the whole thing a real depth to the book, that keeps you guessing throughout.

SMALL PRESS SPOTLIGHT

We look at some great reads which are only available online

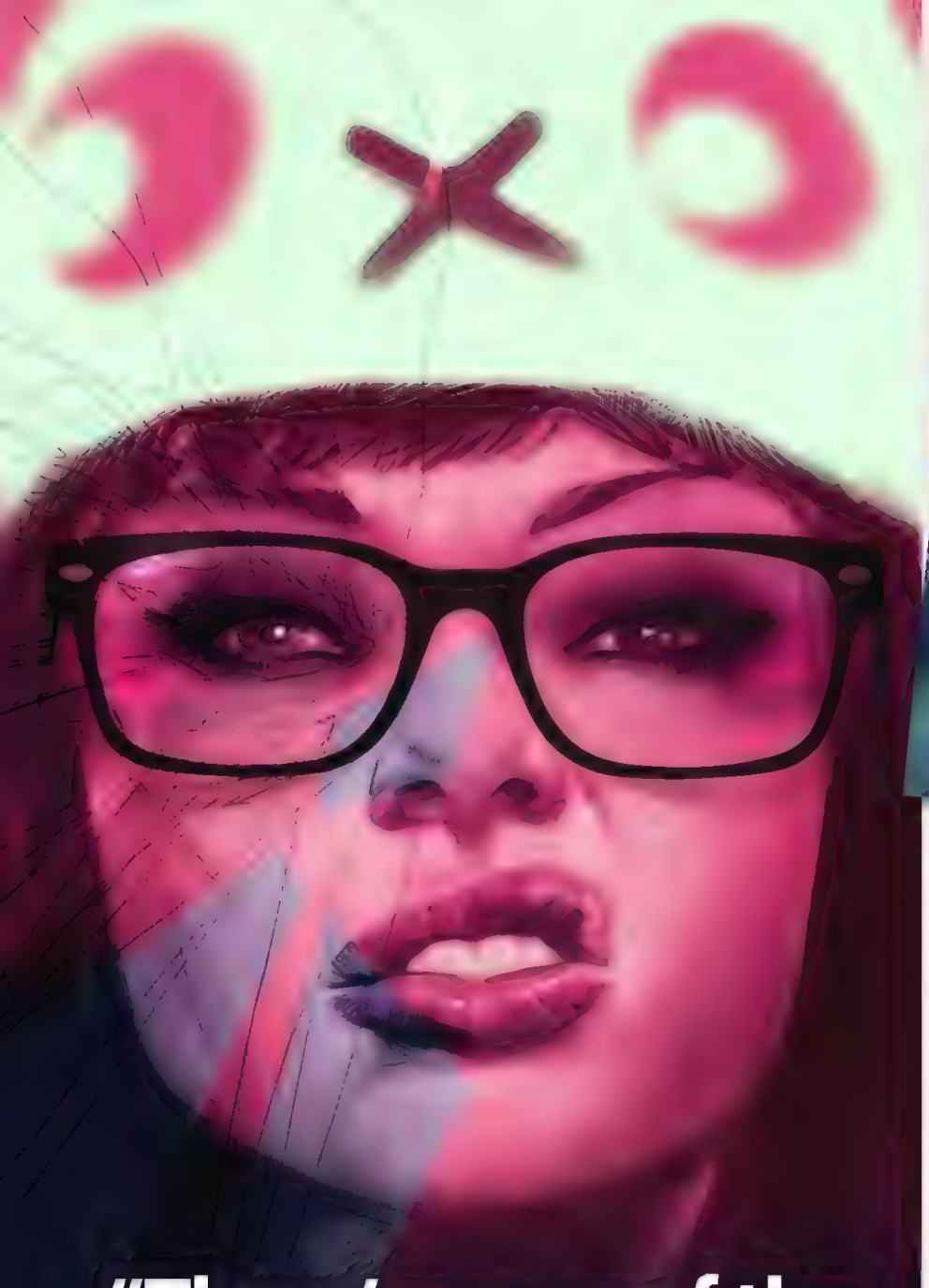
We discovered this powerful mini comic from Marvel artist Dean Trippe via a Twitter thread started by the Thought Bubble team asking for recommendations for books that handle issues to do with mental health. **Something Terrible** is a personal reflection from Trippe looking back at his own experience of childhood abuse, but also how he addressed his own concerns about it being cyclical when he became a parent. Trippe explains how his discovery of superheroes and comics help him deal with his own childhood problems and the redeeming powers that he learned from them as he grew up and also in his adult life. While this may sound like it trivialises what is such a traumatic incident in Trippe's life it is anything but that. Trippe uses the language and visual shorthand of superhero comics to articulate not only his trauma (including a very poignant moment with the caped crusader), but also his recovery. By using this familiar language and style it makes the story both impactful and very readable - which helps tell the story in an more memorable way.

As you would expect with an artist of Trippe's calibre, the artwork is exquisite, with the whole thing having a Bruce Timm style mix of realism and fantasy. His clever use of visual metaphors give the story an incredible depth and potency to every panel. The thing that you are left with most at the end of reading this story, is not only the horrific nature of what happened to the young Dean, but the redemptive story that he tells. It means the book is as uplifting as it is harrowing, with an ultimately positive message, that cycles can be broken and people can recover from these kinds of incidents. As a result Something Terrible has a message which is enduring and makes it one which people can take inspiration from in order to help improve their own lot. A incredibly powerful and moving piece of art. **Purchase Something Terrible for $5 from www.ironcircus.com**

The Boy Who Loved A Ghost Clown is an incredible webcomic we found via Trujilo's Gustavo Vargas, and is one of those timely reminders of the quality of work that is being released online around the world. Hungarian artist Mark Laszlo's tale of a young boy who becomes obsessed with a singing clown in his local circus, is a mix of Tales from the Crypt and a Victorian Penny Dreadful. It has a really classic tone to it, and feels like it could have been made at any point in the last 60 years, but it has that contemporary edge and stylishness that comes from an increased understanding of what makes comics work. The artwork has this ghoulish quality to it , and swirls around the pages like a plume of smoke, twisting in and out of the panels which are rendered in a haunting black and white pen and ink style. The artwork mixes these dark and creepy images of circuses, with the ghostly clown to create something really haunting. With clowns and circuses very much in the Zeitgeist at the moment there are obvious comparisons to characters like IT's Pennywise the clown, but it is more Christmas Carol meets Tim Burton via The Greatest Showman. It is much more than just a traditional creepy horror story though, it is something more enigmatic and more interesting.

Read it for free at www.behance.net/gallery/77345181/The-boy-who-loved-a-ghostclown-COMIC

Kate Philips' glorious webcomic **High Tide** sees her out of control laundry pile take over her life and she is set adrift on a laundry ocean as a Robinson Crusoe style castaway. The whole story is told wordlessly as she floats aboard her mattress raft on a sea of socks, shirts and underwear. As she attempts to tackle her own procrastination, she is visited by a shark like leather jacket and a shirt that looks like manta ray and there is even a passing ship which bears an uncanny resemblance to an iron, before she is swamped by a tidal wave of socks. It's a series of glorious visual metaphors that really hit home the tediousness of housework, but also the relief of finally taming those jobs you never want to do. The minutiae of daily life is delightfully brought to life and is packed full of originality and some really inspired moments. High Tide is real gem of a read and has made Philips into a creator who we will definitely be paying more attention to in the future. If only because it will inspire our own productivity! **You can read High Tide for free at www.katephillips.net/hightide**



"There's none of the tedious posturing and do-gooding you get in most comics"

Monty Nero on why Death Sentence isn't your average capes comic!

Monty Nero and Martin Simmonds' sex, drugs and superpowers series Death Sentence: Liberty Girl is back with a new series on Kickstarter. We find out the secrets of the world of G-Plus and talk to the creator itself – the man behind the mayhem, Monty Nero.

For those new to the world of Death Sentence, can you give us a quick catch up on what it's all about?

Monty Nero: It's about a sexually transmitted virus that kills you in six months but gives you superpowers. So what would you do if you could do anything in that time? We see how it affects three ordinary people: Verity, a frustrated artist, Weasel, a rock star, and Roots, a drug dealer. They all start to do amazing things, transforming their lives. Then there's Jeb, who's an undercover FBI agent trying to discover more about the virus. After the first issue, which is epic action, things get pretty freaky and dark.

The concept of a superhero virus that is caught rather than gained and also gives those with powers

a limited life span, really gives the book a unique twist on the superhero genre. Was this the initial spark for Death Sentence?

MN: Yeah, the most original thing about Death Sentence is the whole approach. The tone. The way the characters look and act, like you or I would. There's none of this tedious posturing and do-gooding you get in most superhero comics. But it's not cynical either. It's just funny, dark, and real.

The spark was just that horrible feeling that you're running out of time and there's so much left undone. Everyone feels that. We're all dying, slowly. It's an acute dramatisation of our essential dilemma as humans. That's why it resonates with people.

You're bringing this new series to Kickstarter rather than publish it via Titan Comics, why is that?

MN: The first series was made independently and Titan picked it up later. They did a great job initially but that wild rock 'n' roll spirit has always been integral to our ethos. It's why the comic's so damn good. Me and Martin work at all the subtle storytelling details, I edit it, we do exactly what we want, and the results speak for themselves.

Death Sentence isn't afraid to have a bit of adult content and lives up to its sex, drugs and superpowers mantra. Do you find you can push the boundaries a bit further when self-publishing it?

MN: My only interest is in reflecting the real world. You get plasterer's living the rock n roll lifestyle these days, financial analysts, salesmen! I was shocked people thought the first series was out there. There is a lot of satirical exaggeration in Death Sentence, but only to expose the sordid truth. God knows the world is fucked right now, it's important to have characters who acknowledge that. What to do about it is the question. Verity's got a few ideas.

Artist Martin Simmonds has had a stellar year with books like Punks Not Dead and Friendo, but it looks like he has saved his best for Death Sentence? What is it about Martin's work that seems to suit the world of Death Sentence so well?

MN: This is his greatest work, I think. You get periods in artists' lives where their knowledge and skill and enthusiasm and opportunity all reach an apex and Martin's going through that phase here. To read his work is to read an artist revelling in the art of storytelling – stretching himself for the sheer joy of it. Issue 2 is mind-blowingly beautiful. And issue 3 raises the bar further. Comic fans would be upset to miss this. I'm just enjoying the ride like everyone else.

Death Sentence has always felt quite political and satirical, but has the tone shifted in the past few years as the world has got more crazy and far-fetched?

MN: The first book was very much a satire about the horrors of the Noughties when the garden seemed very rosy. It wasn't set then, but that was the theme. The second book was more a reaction to what was happening as we made Death Sentence in that second decade of the 21st Century, the London riots, the politics. The third book starts to look more forward, and by the end of the series we'll be trying to find a path out of this current madness.

Death Sentence: Liberty Girl will return to Kickstarter in 2019. Find out more about Monty's work at www.montynero.com and pick up volumes 1 & 2 of Death Sentence via Monty's online store.

Alongside regular artist Martin Simmonds, #3 features a cover from Marvel's Luke Ross

To The Death

Publisher: FBF Productions
Writer: Simon Furman
Artist: Geoff Senior, Jim Campbell
Price: £4.99 from Get My Comics

As you would hope in a comic with a title like 'To The Death' the action begins hot and heavy on a battle ravaged planet, as a group of ass-kicking soldiers battle alien monsters armed to the teeth with cutting edge, heavy duty weaponry.

If you like your comics to start with a bang, then you couldn't ask for more as the opening pages are a relentless series of explosions and fight scenes as the soldiers take on alien after alien to devastating effect. However there is more to this battle than simple alien destruction as the whole thing is being live streamed to a blood thirsty public back home, evoking The Hunger Games or Running Man..

As the smoke clears on the battle we are introduced to the team in more depth, from leader Aleksy to team mates Kraken, Flynn and Leone. It's your usual rag tag bunch of intergalactic soldiers, with echoes of the classic Aliens spaceship scenes when the mix of banter and bravado gets going.

As the team returns to earth, we learn about the giant corporation who runs things, the fact that the soldiers are TV stars who perform these daring feats for ratings, and also that Aleksy is about to return home to his family (who he hasn't seen for years) as a conquering hero and head into retirement. But as you can imagine, the corporation have other ideas which is the impetus for the second part of the story arc.

"Action-packed sci-fi with a satirical streak running through it's battle scarred heart."

To The Death is a fantastic slice of all action high energy sci-fi, but with a satirical edge running through it's battle scarred heart. At the beginning it's not at all subtle and starts with one hell of a bang, but the way the story begins to take shape and expand is really interesting. The concepts all feel quite familiar, but Furman expertly weaves these elements together to make something really interesting amid the action packed chaos.

Furman's long time collaborator Senior also brings his A-game to this series. The artwork has the mixed media approach of Bill Sienkiewicz, the ink splats of early Jae Lee and the high energy action of Frank Miller's 300 which creates a unique collage of destruction and makes for a potent comic with a very strong visual identity.

To The Death is a fantastically visceral high energy debut that has exceptional production values and looks set to be one of the most interesting and action-packed new British releases of the year.

Mountainhead

Publisher: IDW Publishing
Writer: John Lees
Artist: Ryan Lee
Price: £2.49 from ComiXology

The latest creator-owned series from IDW begins with father and son burglars getting more than they bargained for when a robbery goes wrong. But develops into a supernatural mystery in a remote Canadian mountain resort

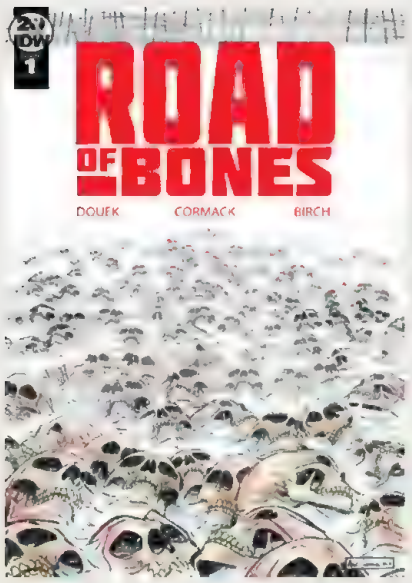
Mountainhead is one of those books which is hard to categorise. It is probably best described as a horror (and the dismembered corpse on the opening page backs that up) however, this isn't a gore and monsters book. Instead it has that kind of unsettling horror built around secrets, that makes you question everyone's motives and actions. It's the kind horror that really sticks with you.

Mountainhead feels unlike anything we've read in a while, as the story twists and turns in unexpected directions. What starts as a crime caper, becomes a small town mystery by the end, but with a supernatural undercurrent that will keep have you wondering what is going on well after you have finished it.

The artwork from Ryan Lee is also particularly dark and twisted with scratchy detail and angular lines that give it a creepy sense of style. It has that expressive darkness of Greg Capullo, but also the twisted weirdness of Mark Stafford's Lip Hook. All of which helps make the more horrific moments even more unsettling as they are both odd and outlandish in equal measure.

There is a lot going on in this first issue and there are probably a few too many open ends for our liking by the final page. There is perhaps one idea too many or 10 pages too few for it to really hit home what this series is all about. However, this is a debut that is packed full of promise and you can tell that in future issues they will come to the fore.

Mountainhead has a ton of potential for the future and is definitely a book that is worth investing in, as once we are a couple of issues in, it should be something unsettlingly good.



Road of Bones

Publisher: IDW Publishing
Writer: Rich Douek
Artist: Alex Cormack (Artist), Justin Birch (Letterer)
Price: £2.49 from ComiXology

Set in a Soviet labour camp, Roman Ivanovich Morozov and his fellow inmates look to stage an escape after being caught hoarding food for a fairytale creature. But, it turns out that the escape may just be the easy part.

Gutter Magic's Rich Douek has produced an engrossing yet brutal story. He has really done his research into Soviet Russia as the entire issue makes you question whether this is meant to be a period drama or supernatural horror.

Alex Cormack's art is every bit the equal to the writing, with a style reminiscent of Michael Lark's work on Lazarus or (more fittingly) Steve Epting's Sara. Cormack's style is a lot rougher but this works well with the books aesthetic, and his work is amazingly detailed which adds a lived in and brutal layer to the story.

Douek, Cormack and letterer Justin Birch have produced a dark and disturbing, yet genuinely intriguing tale about survival in one of the most world's most vicious environments.

PUBLISHER SPOTLIGHT

"Our aim is to nurture new talent and bring new voices to indie comics"

Alex Thomas takes a look at the team from **Good Comics**

For our latest profile of essential UK small press publishers, we turn our attention to the folk at Good Comics.

Launched in 2015 by Paddy Johnston and Sam Williams (then joined by Rozi Hathaway in 2018), Good Comics started life with the first issue of the Dead Singers Society zine. Since those early days, they have developed from zine publishers to releasing their own books, as well as representing UK and international talent. They've also kept true to their zine roots, with the Good Zines imprint. Their aim is to "nurture new talent and bring new voices to the community of independent comics", which we think they do brilliantly, so here are 4 titles which help to reinforce that inclusive and diverse message:

Dead Singers Society

The series which started it all, is a collection of stories from a variety of creators that pay homage to dead pop stars. Subjects range from the mainstream like Ian Dury or Amy Winehouse to more esoteric like Elliot Smith. A mix of strips and long form articles it features a variety of artists which makes this a really fascinating, if slightly macabre read.

Human Garbage by Joshua Hicks

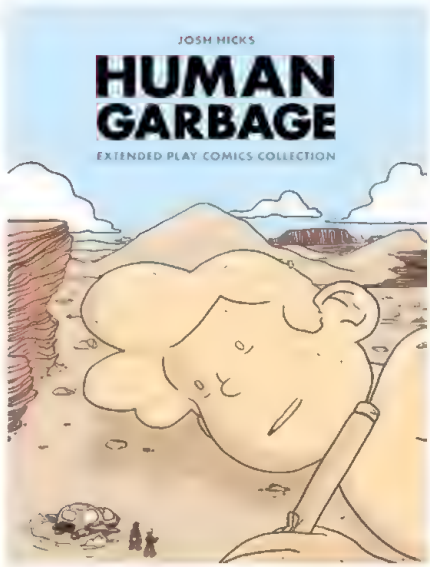
As well as releasing his Glorious Wrestling Alliance books, Good Comics brought us this fantastic collection of previously published work from cartoonist Josh Hicks. It includes a fun mix of pulpy detective stories, personal reflections and silly one shotes, which are all laced with bags

of

Josh's brilliant sense of humour.

The Times I Knew I Was Gay by Eleanor Crewes

Perhaps the most accomplished Good Comics title to date. Eleanor Crewes' high personal account of how she discovered her sexuality throughout her teens and early twenties, is told in a really thoughtful and considered way. Instead of relying on one key moment, it is more of a trickle effect that sees her come to her realization gradually.



You can purchase all these and more from www.goodcomics.co.uk/bookstore

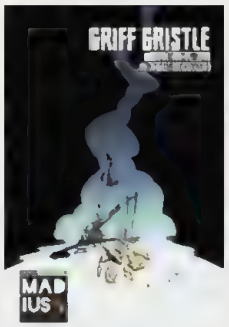
The natural style and compelling tone of voice sees her tell her highly personal story in an almost diary like style, and so makes this is a brave and important work.

Petrichor by Gareth A Hopkins

When it comes to pushing the boundaries of what comics really are, then there aren't many creators who push things as far as Gareth Hopkins. His unique brand of abstract comics use collage and mixed media to create pages that look like out of control Rorschach images, but these images are backed up with snippets of dialogue which repeat hypnotically to give the whole thing a wonderfully surreal yet completely absorbing tone that really is one of a kind.

Griff Gristle: The Endless Voyage

Publisher: Madius Comics
Writer: Rob Jones, Michael Sambrook
Artist: Rory Donald
Price: £7 from www.madius-comics.co.uk/shop



The third volume of Madius Comic's nautical adventure picks up where volume 2, Siren's Song left off, with Griff recovering from a battle on board a cruise ship with only his memories of his beloved Betty to guide him.

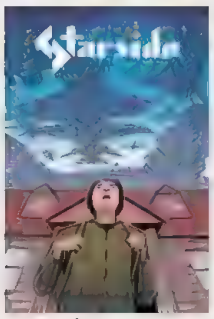
Jones and Sambrook hit the ground running with yet another fun read of what is truly becoming an incredibly unique character. This issue sees the pair tie up the prior instalment's apparently unconnected story-lines to form a bigger, more epic tale. This change of pace really helps make things a little more epic with a lot of setup towards a presumed fourth issue finale. There's also a lot more focus on Griff's personality as he is offered more depth and focus showing him as much more of a broken soul instead of a Hellboy-like master of ceremony.

Meanwhile, Rory Donald's artwork remains just as gorgeous. Although it still imbues a Hellboy/BPRD style, the colour scheme seems to have becomes more distinctive here with it's blue and cooler colours really helping sell the seagoing aesthetic.

While Endless Voyage feels somewhat quieter than prior instalments, Jones, Sambrook and Donald give us another entertaining story which is starting to develop Griff into the stand-out comic series which Madius are aiming for. A must read for fans of the soon to be ending Mignola-verse.

Starside #1 -2

Publisher: Starside Comics
Writer: Dylan Klein, Lane Brettschneider
Artist: Jordan Chao
Price: $3.99 from ComiXcentral



Starside tells the story of Jack, a, quiet, decidedly everyday, young man whose life of school, friends and family is torn apart when the Earth witnesses an alien invasion.

As Jack attempts to escape these otherworldly aggressors, one wrong turn sees him taken prisoner and placed in a cell on the spaceships and taken far into the depths of space. Can Jack and the other prisoners escape, if so, where do they go?

Writers Klein and Brettschneider have produced a really enjoyable story, despite (or maybe even due to) it's quiet demeanour. The story is broken up into two parts, the pre and post invasion, which allows the opening, quiet half to introduce their protagonist properly before moving on to the more action packed second half where a faster pace helps keep you hooked.

Artist Jordan Chao, offers up some seriously gorgeous artwork in both issues of Starside and utilises a style which has a slightly European feel to it, as well as reminding us of Joshua Sherwell's work in The Kill Screen, and looks incredible with every panel.

Starside is a really captivating and beautiful comic which manages to take the focus of something as epic as an alien invasion and place it squarely on a single character as he experiences it all.

Illegal

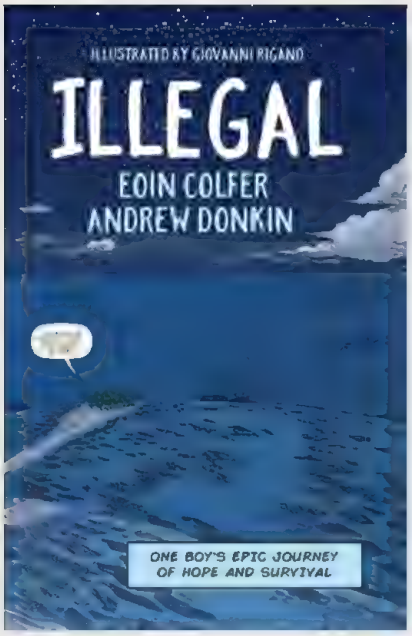
Publisher: Hodder Childrens
Writer: Andrew Donkin, Eoin Colfer
Artist: Giovanni Rigano
Price: £9.99 from Amazon

Illegal follows a pair of African brothers who are economic migrants, and their perilous journey to find a better life in Europe.

Writer Andrew Donkin and Eoin Colfer strong working relationship which they forged on the Artemis Fowl graphic novels reaps rewards here as the book is wonderfully written. It builds the brothers' story scene by scene and makes it feel as if it could be a true story even though it isn't. They perfectly balance the seriousness of the subject with a lightness which makes the story much readable and powerful.

The artwork from Artemis Fowl collaborator Rigano has the polish of a mainstream book, but with the subtlety and range of an indie. It brilliantly balances the simple quiet moments of the brothers in a boat with the epic scale of their journey.

Illegal is a poignant and powerful story, which is beautifully told. The kind of books which deserves to cross over from the niche of comics into mainstream success.



Sequential Empathy

The Unflinching yet Sensitive Flourishing of Mental Health in Indie Comics: Part 1

Dear reader, this article comes to you much later, and longer, than intended. When I began piecing together a general overview of mental health's depiction in independent and small press comics, I didn't guess it would blossom into what's before you now. I like to think the rising number of comics I've covered and creators I've interviewed as I worked on this piece reflects the amount of talent out there making great strides in providing us with empathetic, truthful illustrations of what it's like to live with a mental health condition.

Rachael Smith's work mixes personal moments with a light -hearted comic reflection on her experiences of anxiety and depression

The profile of mental health is on a considerable rise, for better and for worse. Bryan Cranston has encouraged us to peel away at the orange. Universities across the U.K. have been urged to increase support for young people with mental health problems. A recent edition of Channel 4's Dispatches series uncovered the severe pressure that mental health services are under in helping those affected by a condition. Reflecting that rise in mental health awareness in our society is an increase of independent comics that choose to utilise mental health as the soil in which to grow their stories and characters from.

Although mental illness can take many forms, anxiety and depression are the most familiar illnesses that appear in sequential form. Whether that's a reflection of just how many people endure anxiety and depression, or whether more comic creators happen to live with those precise mental health issues is up for debate. From self-published zines to ongoing single issues, web comics and Kickstarter campaigns for anthologies, creators are rapidly flooding the independent scene with comics that aim to increase alertness of mental health, both educating and emphasising the reader into a better understanding of coping with day-to-day tasks with a mental illness, through realism, humour or metaphors. "I think art has that power that not much else does in this world," says Roddy McCance, writer and editor behind Fracture Press' Tales of the Fractured Mind, an anthology that encompasses seven strips based on seven separate mental illnesses. "You can read about mental health, but you don't necessarily read about the emotions or see the people behind the descriptions or news items."

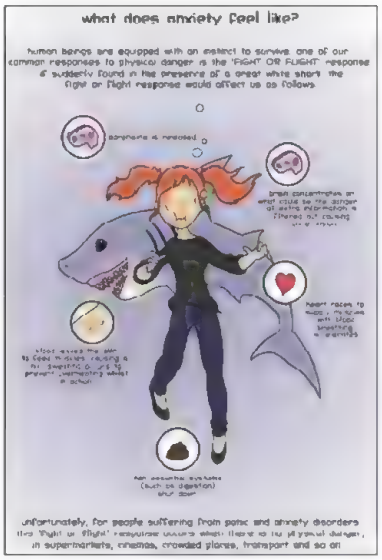
Taking Roddy's reasoning for creating his anthology a step further, despite the aforementioned diversity in medium of mental health's portrayal throughout indie comics, many are united in their themes by placing their own creators as the main characters. That grounded sense of reality makes their empathetic stories resonate deeper with the reader, and the comic in question a more authoritative affair.

"Mental illness takes many forms, but anxiety and depression are the most familiar"

Standing in your Humour

Numerous indie comics that tackle mental health bear an intense flavour due to their autobiographical nature. Rachael Smith's Wired Up Wrong, Emily B. Owen's Brain Shoodles and Dani Abraham's Worry Wart make no qualms about their protagonists having anxiety and depression, neither do they shy away from the fact that the protagonists are in fact the creators themselves.

Wired Up Wrong, Brain Shoodles and Worry Wart are intimate, funny and heart-breaking. Throughout each publication, Rachael, Emily and



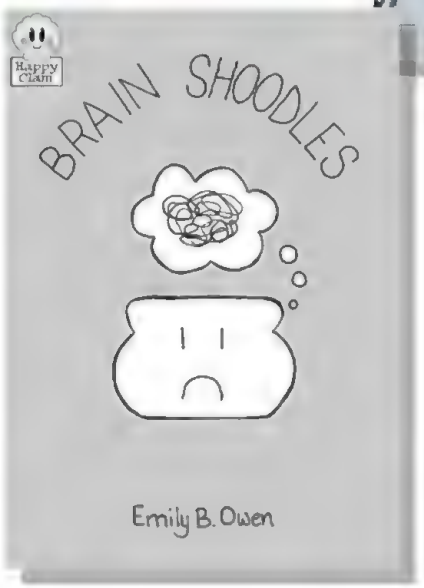
many panic attacks later and i was convinced i was a crazy
i once bolted from a queue in the supermarket because i was afraid i would just start yelling and screaming
i became obsessed with routine
one day on my usual walk to work a road was closed for roadworks
i sat down on a bench and cried and cried.

Dani Abrams and Emily Owen's books don't shy away from featuring the creators themselves

Dani give intricate, precise details about how the daily activates of their lives are thrown off balance by their mental health conditions. Much like the content of these comics, their genesis were muted, solitary affairs. "I started making auto-bio comics again for my Patreon supporters," explains Rachael. "I noticed that the ones that dealt with my struggles with anxiety and depression tended to be the more popular ones, so I decided to make a whole book of them." A reflection perhaps, then, of audience's desire to see more mental health presentations in media? The success Rachael's found with both this and its follow-up, Stand In Your Power, would suggest so.

Wired Up Wrong boasts a warm, compact sort of friendliness to it. Its breezy, light-hearted, comical reflection of Rachael's own day-to-day doings is underpinned by its deeper application of anxiety and depressions' effects on the daily tasks we may take for granted. Each of Wired Up Wrong's strips builds towards some manner of punchline from Rachael's humorous interpretation of her life. Rachael illustrates herself, her friends and family in a bright, accessibly vibrant manner, almost like a newspaper strip. There's a delightfully innocent vibe to Wired Up Wrong's visuals and sitcom-esque situations of Rachael gently poking fun at her own dealings with anxiety and depression.

That sense of humour ripples gently across these comics. Rachael



illustrates most of Wired Up Wrong in a four-panel structure, whilst in Brain Shoodles, Emily draws herself as a dumpling-like caricature. The aforementioned sense of realism in these comics' autobiographical format is at odds with their lacing of caricatured humour. "I guess making jokes about it is one of my coping mechanisms," explains Rachael. "I

"A warm sense of humour ripples gently across all these comics."

also wanted the book to be warm and humorous rather than just bleak." Emily's zine is another comic that balances the grim with the hilarity. Her illustrations share the same minimalist, uncluttered style of Wired Up Wrong. The 'Shoodles' in the comic's title is a fusion of Emily's own creation; shit doodles, a bleakly hilarious reflection of the comic's DIY nature. Illustrating herself like she does, yet also presented in stark black-and-white, Brain Shoodles feels like a very literal handling of the funny and the sad.

DIY Doodles

Emily guides us through her daily routines, breaking the fourth wall further than Wired Up Wrong. That sense of interactivity from Brain Shoodles highlights the zine's immensely personal mechanics, as if Emily is speaking directly to you. Much like Wired Up Wrong, Emily finds the best way to display her struggles with mental health in the mundane and intimate moments of her life. Brain Shoodles may not have begun life as a comic, yet its straight-forward nature highlights its determined attitude, as if it's on a mission to depict a sincere reflection of how anxiety and

Roddy McCance says you can read about mental health, but you don't necessarily see the people behind the descriptions or news items.

depression can affect those who may seemingly have a positive life, including Emily's. "The hard bit was ignoring the internal voices which tell you you're not good enough, that no-one will read it, that you're embarrassing. Those voices tend to be the ones that shout the loudest and the ones that we most easily believe are telling us the truth."

By comparison, Worry Wart sheds the humour almost completely, and expands on the more explicit scenes of Wired Up Wrong and Brain Shoodles. Dani's own comic, initially a web comic but now also a print edition, explains the extreme physical effects anxiety has on her. What initially begins as nervous tummy expands into panic attacks, diarrhoea and avoidance of food itself. Dani eloquently explains and shows her severe symptoms with a firm, fearless clarity. Her unfolding journey in discovering what's wrong with her and how she bears with these symptoms make for brutal yet honest reading. Sharing the visually stripped-back manner of Rachael and Emily's work, Worry Wart presents itself with bare backgrounds, emphasising Worry Wart's focus on Dani and her self-exploratory nature of her anxiety.

Worry Wart finds some positivity however, as Dani finds stability in her condition through medicine, yoga and self-care, the last of which is a message shared between these three comics. Worry Wart, Brain Shoodles and Wired Up Wrong don't end on a triumphant note, indeed there's a sense that they don't really 'end' at all. Rather, they acknowledge that having anxiety and depression is a road that's not easily prepared at all, and to savour the moments in which yourself or a loved one can provide comfort. "Although these are very much all my experiences I would never have put the comic together if other people hadn't told me that they related to them too," says Emily, emphasising the sense of empathy scattered amidst these diverse titles. "Every page in the comic is something I have been through and the thought of helping even one person feel less alone was a driving force in getting it out there even if I was feeling like the biggest imposter in the world." A tangible feeling of connecting to the reader is cemented in these comics, born out of a form of illness that's stigmatised by its abstract nature, an illness which some who don't understand it think we should just stop feeling like. As we'll explore later, Rachael Rowan Olive's wonderfully sweary zine A is for Awkward pokes the perfect sort of hole in this logic with a particular page of herself being asked a question interminably asked far too often by those with mental health illnesses: 'Have you tried… Just… Not hating yourself?'

"Anxiety and depression is a road that's not easily prepared at all"

Warts and all

What unites these comics is a boldness, a bravery to depict the fallout of anxiety and depression in a caricatured state, as if to soften the blow for the reader. Brain Shoodles comes from the word shit. Dani depicts herself on the bog. Rachael recounts bouts self-harm. "Some of it came very naturally and some was very cathartic," says Rachael. "I found the story about my experiences in secondary school really difficult to write about as it's something I've spent most of my life trying not to think about. I think it did me good to get it all down on paper though."

OPINION

"You may have the best concepts, in the world but you still need to tell a great story."

Alex Thomas looks at the secret of a great first issue

Writing the first issue of a small press comic is no mean feat. Not only do you need to have a gem of an idea in the first place, but you also have to have the passion and motivation to see it through to completion - writing, drawing, colouring, lettering, editing and publishing it. But what are the secrets to a good first issue? Here at ComicScene we see dozens of new small press comics every month, but here 's what we look for in a debut:

1. Introduce your world
While you may know your story inside and out, the reader does not. So it is up to you to tell them about it. A first issue is all about introducing the world you have created to the readers. If you have a complex, multi-levelled society use things like an intro page or a dialogue heavy conversation to explain things.

2. Create strong characters
While world building is important, characters are everything. If you have strong characters who readers can relate to, empathise with, or downright loathe, then you are half way there. In fact character development can be the entire focus of a debut issue, especially if you are using strong archetypes or characters with a well defined traits.

3. Tell a story
You may have the best world and the most dynamic characters, but you still need to tell a story. That story may be built around explaining the world or introducing the characters, but you must do both. Without a story your comic will have no direction, or purpose and could end up just being a series of meaningless set pieces.

These great debut issues all features strong characters, concept and originality

4. Something original
It's important to come up with something unique. We're not saying that every book needs to be the second coming of Watchmen, but a gem of originality can go a long way. Your USP might be your lead character, the culture of your world, or even the printing of your book. If you use a familiar genre like superheroes, then try looking at it from a different angle. Don't just rehash what's gone before.

5. A reason to come back
Even if you are working on a one shot, it is vital to create a reason for readers to return. If you are writing a long series, then include a cliffhanger, and be sure to leave a number of questions unanswered to entice people back - but don't leave it so open ended that readers don't know what is going on. And don't pose so many questions that they lose the plot completely. If you are working on a one-shot, leave the ending open so you could potentially return to these characters in the future.

OPINION

"Issue #2 is where you make your great idea more meaningful"

Alex Thomas looks at the secret to writing a great second issue

Last month we looked at the secret to writing a great first issue of a comic. However writing a follow up is almost as difficult. So here's what we look for in second, third and fourth issues...

These great second issues help to develop their stories in exciting new directions

1. Know where your story is heading

While the first issue is all about introducing your great idea to the world, the second issue is where you make it into something more meaningful. This is why you need to know where your story is heading. If it's a multi-issue epic then you should already be looking at the big picture. But if you are looking at a much shorter run then structure your story to fit the number of issues you can realistically complete in order to finish your story properly and in a reasonable time.

2. Expand your world

While the first issue may be all about introducing your heroes and heroines, the following issues are all about expanding the characters you have - and potentially introducing more. Rather than cram everything into the debut hold some characters for issue #2 or make sure to add depth to those you introduced in issue #1.

3. Make it accessible to all

The great man Stan Lee once said every comic should be written for someone who is reading it for the first time. While this definitely held true for the mass market days of the early 60s, this is still vital. After all, every reader needs to start somewhere. Making it so that a new reader needs to read pages of back story just to catch up will be intimidating and put them off even starting. This is where structuring your story can help. Build mini arcs or tell self contained stories to help readers get into your books more easily. Also consider recap and intro pages for in depth storylines.

4. Consistency is key

While you may have poured every ounce of blood sweat and tears into your debut, you are going to have to do the same for future issues, or else readers will feel short changed. Keep writing and production values at a constant level, and try to retain the same creative team in order to give a sense of continuity. If you can't keep the band together then make that part of the series unique features.

5. Keep them coming back for more

This is as much of a logistical point as it is a creative one. While we are used to the Big Two releasing books every month, in small press things can be a lot slower. Make sure you set your schedule to be manageable and keep your time between issues to a reasonable gap. You can't leave that cliffhanger dangling forever!

MANU Altiplano Vol. 1

Publisher: Tacu Tinta Press
Writer/Artist: Gustaffo Vargas
Price: £5 at gustaffovargas.bigcartel.com

Gustaffo Vargas burst on to the small press scene in 2018 with the dazzlingly unique Peruvian sci-fi comics Trujillo and L1MA. Their mix of sleazy South American criminals and spectacular neon-infused Incan visuals, made them some of the most memorable books we read all year. Now Gustaffo is back, with a full length story from his sci-fi jungle world, but will his unique style be sustainable across a longer story?

MANU begins in the Amazonian jungle where a young woman in Incan face paint is being pursued by a cybernetic jaguar. It perfectly sets the tone for the world we are entering, with it's mix of the old natural world order and a new high-tech one, which collide in an instant. It also gives us a hint of the kind of frenetic and visually unique style of comic we have ahead.

The woman being pursued is Sonia, who is on the way to see her lover Canella, and fortunately for her, the jaguar is just a pet. Canella is your classic loner in hiding, and when a team of mercenaries interrupt her and Sonia's quality time we begin to wonder what she is hiding from, especially when the couple head to the city.

While the story of MANU is relatively straight forward, it is well told and certainly more ambitious and expansive than TRUJILLO and L1MA – both of which suffered from trying to tell too ambitious a story in a condensed space. Here the story has plenty of room to breathe and the characters are allowed time to develop.

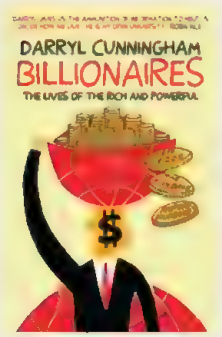
"It brings a unique angle to dystopian cyberpunk comics, by setting it in an Amazonian jungle"

We often talk about the importance of originality in small press, and this book has it by the bucket load. Just as Vault Comics' These Savage Shores turned a vampire story into something unique by setting it in India, Vargas brings a completely new angle to the world of dystopian cyberpunk comics, by setting it in the South American jungle. With a mix of traditional clothing, contrasting with high-tech creatures, and lush tree-scapes, Vargas's line-work feels like something from the Prog. While some pages can be a bit rough, each page has a raw energy that enables you to forgive any minor discrepancies, and they are all rendered with some sublime colouring that make it really pop and make it feel completely original.

With books like MANU as well as this year's Boy Abducted by Aliens Returns, Gustaffo is really creating a names for himself as one of small press' most interesting creators. This is the perfect calling card for him, as well as an ideal jumping on point for new fans.

Billionaires

Publisher: Myriad International
Writer/Artist: Darryl Cunningham
Price: £16.99 from Amazon



As comics fans we're used to the concept of global mega corporations ruling the world, but these are usually seen in dystopian sci-fi thrillers.

Darryl Cunningham's Billionaires features many of those themes, but it is all based in reality as he profiles 4 of the world's richest and most powerful men - News International's Rupert Murdoch, Amazon's Jeff Bezos and US energy magnates the Koch Brothers.

Cunningham's meticulously researched book deals in facts rather than hyperbole, laying out each man's journey to the top of the rich list, and picks up on the common themes that allowed all four to succeed. Whether that is gender, ethnicity, inherited wealth or a willingness to embrace new markets, and exploit old ones to suit their needs. It's a fascinating look at these powerful men and the influence which they have on our daily lives and also on the governments they seek to control.

Cunningham uses a very simple, almost impressionistic art style which uses a minimum of lines and fuss to illustrate his story. With a strict panel structure and smart use of a limited colour palette it feels more like a newspaper cartoon than a comic, and in a lot of ways the images are there to visually compliment the text rather than lead the narrative which better suits the message he is trying to tell.

Fascinating and frightening in equal measures, if this were a work of fiction you would struggle to believe it.

MULP: Sceptre of the Sun

Publisher: Improper Books
Writer: Matt Gibbs
Artist: Sara Dunkerton
Price: £2.49 at ComiXology

This new issue of Matt Gibbs and Sara Dunkerton's glorious mouse based pulp adventure serial is bitter sweet. On one hand it is a new chapter of this wondrous series that sees a group of archaeological rodents attempting to recover a lost artefact. But on the other, this final issue means the end for this truly unique series.

Across it's 5 issue run MULP has been a consistent delight. It's wonderful concept has felt like Indiana Jones meets Bramley Hedge, yet it has avoided being just another cute animal book by layering the story with a quaint charm and a really well constructed adventure serial tone that sees the mice live in a world where humans no longer exist, giving it a really unique and intriguing culture.

Dunkerton's gorgeous painted artwork has been a revelation. It makes every panel feel like something from a classic children's book rather than a comic. She has coped effortlessly with whatever concept Gibbs has thrown at her, from giant bird-like creatures to Incan temples and much more besides. The characters are wonderfully cute and expressive, but also incredibly well studied and their mix of human and animal anatomy is faultless.

With an ending which leaves the door open for more, we are keeping our paws firmly crossed as MULP has been one of the most glorious adventures in small press comics!

The Tower in the Sea

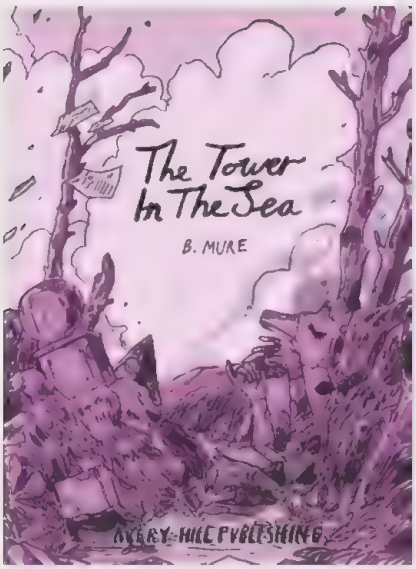
Publisher: Avery Hill Publishing
Writer/Artist: B. Mure
Price: £8.99 from averyhillpublishing.bigcartel.com/

The latest chapter from B. Mure's Ismyre series is another sublime slice of whimsical, magical fantasy.

This chapter follows Miriam a young orphan who is sent to divination school at an early age. While there she attempts to find meaning for her apocalyptic dreams, but is this a premonition or something more?

With its magical school theme, the Tower in the Sea has an obvious Harry Potter feel to it, but it's a long way from being a knock off of the boy wizard. Packed full of wonderfully esoteric characters, from the shy and unassuming Miriam to her clueless owl buddy Efrim, through to intimidating teacher Madame Cornelia, it's a story that is powered forward by it's wonderful characters.

Visually the story looks incredible again with B's watercolour wash style giving every page this multi coloured textured beauty to it. With so much depth and detail lurking behind these glorious pages, The Tower In The Sea feels like the most polished and accomplished chapter of the Ismyre series so far.



"I think on a surface level it's easier to resonate emotionally to artwork"

Rees Finlay turns his adult autism diagnosis into **Reaffirmation**

Chronicling the diagnosis of his autism in adult life, Rees Finlay's latest book Reaffirmation is a thoughtful and highly emotive look at a very personal issue. We caught up with Rees to find out more about why he chose to tell his story in this way, and the unique format he has used.

Rees uses visual metaphors to explain the various stages of his autism diagnosis

What inspired you to turn this complex and emotional event into a comic?
Rees Finlay: Processing my feelings through comics is becoming a running theme for me now, having done an autobio comic about the moral villainy of working for a payday loan company a few years back. But one year ago I was diagnosed as autistic at the age of 25. Left feeling confused, alone and helpless I turned to my local bookstore. And upon seeing 80% of the autism book section dedicated to children and their parents, I was inspired to join that 20% and contribute my voice.

The book mixes comics and prose, why did you choose that format?
RF: It started as just a collection of short skits and adventures that eventually tie together at the end to show the bigger picture of my journey. But as we know, autism is so broad and complicated, it began to necessitate articles and deeper explorations to clarify and expand on my points. From there it grew into a book where the emotional core is held mostly in the comic pages, with the research and learning part of my journey being expressed through articles, anecdotes and rants within the prose sections.

Why do you think comics lend themselves so well to mental health?
RF: I think on a surface level it's easier to resonate emotionally to artwork, so even if the comics are just stick figures, the drawing of a sad face immediately makes the reader understand the emotional resonance. Also there's the factor that the books are often autobiographical or their foundations are built upon real-life experiences, and the readers find themselves caring for that character a lot more than your Bruces (Banner, Wayne…..Forsyth?) The stakes are higher, you're rooting a lot more for them and you want to see them conquer the demons.

Has writing this book helped you to understand autism better and give your life a renewed direction?
RF: Absolutely. Not only did I make the book that I was desperately needing at the time (so now I can read it, others can too if they like) But through my reading and research I found a new home in the autism community, learning about neurodiversity and discovering the dark and scary history of society's understanding of our condition.

And as my knowledge and understanding grows, I continue to become more aware of myself and how my autism affects me, and allow me to grow in a positive direction.

Rok the God

Publisher: RedRok Comics
Writer: John Wagner, Alan Grant
Artist: Dan Cornwell (Art), Abby Bulmer (Colours), Jim Campbell

Rok the God continues the story of Rok of the Reds, an alien lord who forsakes his destiny on his home world and hides on earth as a talented if precocious footballer.

After the fitting finale of that first series, Rok's idealistic new life as a hometown hero hits an unexpected obstacle when his Uncle arrives to inform him that he must return home to reclaim his place on the throne.

Writers, Wagner and Grant have produced a really entertaining story with Rok the God which has a very witty, quintessentially British feeling to it. As you would expect from these two legends, it feels like 2000AD crossed with Roy of the Rovers and finds a neat middle ground between these two very different worlds.

Artist Dan Cornwell (who was a revelation on the first series) returns and his work manages to expertly keep up with the more sci-fi based settings that Wagner and Grant have given him.

If the series continues in this winning way then it looks set to be another championship season for Rok!

Snow White Zombie Apocalypse

Publisher: Scout Comics
Writer: Brenton Lengel
Artist: Hyeondo Park
Price: TBC from Scout Comics

Based on the title and cover of Snow White Zombie Apocalypse, we were expecting a fairly generic zombie fairytale. But instead we got a really original post-modern mash up of undead monsters and fairytale characters that fizzes with attitude!

Snow White Zombie Apocalypse (SWZA) starts with a twist on the Red Riding Hood story which sees our heroine attacked by an undead Big Bad Wolf. A charming prince is soon on the scene, yet in a smart subversion, it is not him, but a plucky female fighter who delivers the killing blow. Our heroine, Rapunzel, is anything but your trad Disney princess and instead has the fighting skills of Katnis Everdeen and the sassy attitude of Harley Quinn.

The remainder of this first issue sees our heroes encounter other fairytale folk with increasingly gruesome outcomes and delivers a fantastic mix of blood and guts, but with some sparkling dialogue and really engaging and sassy characters.

Writer Lengel uses his fantastically fun characters to power this book along, while the artwork from Hyeondo Park reminded us of J Scott Campbell, but with more blood and less posing!

It's more than just a gore book, as the mix of sparkling dialogue, and smart in jokes that poke fun at fairy-tales and zombie clichés alike make this a great read. Whether it is Rapunzel berating Charming for kissing any inanimate girl in the woods (aka Snow White), or Snow White having been asleep for 28 Days, Lengel manages to make this into much more than just another wannabe Marvel Zombies, or Walking Dead parody.

"I thought exorcising things that I was thinking about might mean I'd clear up some head-space"

Lizzy Stewart on why she needed to create **Walking Distance**

Illustrator and children's book author Lizzy Stewart returns to her comic roots, with Walking Distance, a highly personal look at modern womanhood and women who walk in movies. Told using a unique mix of dense blocks of text and beautiful images we were keen to find out more about how this wonderful book came into being.

Walking Distance starts with a look at Lizzy's love of women walking in movies

Can you tell us a bit about your process for writing Walking Distance?
Lizzy Stewart: I make notes a lot, I'm always trying to pin down the thread of an idea before it gets away so that was, probably the start of it. I had some time at the end of 2018 and I hadn't done any personal work for a while so I knew I wanted to make something but I was struggling to know what that might be. I think the book came out of that struggle. I thought that, perhaps, exorcising the things that I was thinking about constantly might mean I'd clear up some head-space for better ideas in the future!

I don't think I ever thought of it as being a comic. The drawings were a necessity. I find it hard to think of myself as a writer so I tend to come at everything with pictures. It makes the process less daunting!

Your mix of long chunks of text next to pictures is more like a picture book, was that an intentional style choice?
LS: The way that the book works was unavoidable, I think. It was always going to be illustrated yet also text heavy. There are so many things at play in my life that made that decision for me, it was unconscious but inevitable! Primarily I'm a picture book author and illustrator so I think a lot in big images and text chunks.

We love your children's books, why did you feel the need to write something so personal?
LS: To be honest I was struggling to write a new picture book when I wrote this book. I really believe in fiction as a way of explaining the world to children but at the moment The World is a quite a difficult place to explain! I felt like my own brain was getting in the way of the stories I wanted to write, telling me that an idea wasn't useful enough 'in the current climate'. It was quite paralysing. I felt like I had to deal with my own thoughts before I tried to talk to anyone else, especially a child. I'm not sure if it worked, I'm still a bit stuck to be honest!

The pages about your love for women walking in movies is a great hook, have you discovered any more favourites?
LS: I'm hoping that I'm in for many months of film recommendations from readers! Its been a pretty ropey year for new films! There's a film called 'Good Posture' out soon that looks like it might fit my exact requirements though.

You can purchase Walking Distance for £10.99 from the Avery Hill Store

Captain Cosmic

Publisher: Frontier Comics
Writer/Artist: Andy W. Clift
Price: TBC from frontiercomics.bigcartel.com/

If you've been following the adventures of Andy W Clift's intergalactic hero and his plucky sidekick in the pages of ComicScene then you'll know it's a glorious slice of throw back pulp sci-fi. However, what you've read is only the beginning.

While the first issue of CC was Clift's love letter to the silver age, the subsequent issues have built on that passion to create one of the most glorious small press series around. Each issue has developed subtly, giving the series more depth and detail as Clift has channelled classic Dr Who in issue #2, and now 1960s Batman in #3. Introducing us to the sinister Phantom Spaceman, a villain who only appears every 5 years, Clift gives the series a truly enigmatic villain with as poignant past, and gives us the kind of recurring nemesis that can really make this series click.

Clift's artwork continues to be out of this world as well, and manages to make Captain Cosmic into more than just a homage to those halcyon days, but ultimately a book which feels like it could have felt quite at home on the news-stands of a 50s diner!

Money Shot

Publisher: Vault Comics
Writer: Sarah Beattie, Tim Seely
Artist: Rebekah Isaacs
Price: £2.49 from ComiXology

Writing a good adult-oriented sex comedy is no easy task. For every Sex Criminals or Oh Joy Sex Toy, there are a dozen sophomoric sleaze fests which feel like the comic book equivalent of Porkies 2.

Attempting to join this rarefied genre is Money Shot, the latest from the fine folks at Vault Comics. A group of scientists who are struggling to finance their experiments decide to pool their resources and make money by having sex with aliens and broadcast it to a world which has become jaded and cynical by online porn.

Fortunately the emphasis in Money Shot is more on the struggling scientists than the interspecies intercourse and so what could have been a horribly misguided series of alien sex jokes and creepy images, end up being a lot of fun. The characters are well rounded and plausible and there is a strong emphasis on humour and genuine humanity rather than setting out to shock and outrage.

The visuals also help give the book a professional edge, with a J Scott Campbell-esque style featuring clean lines, strong colours and very expressive faces. As well as some fantastically designed aliens.

Inevitably with the kind of concept that this book is built around it isn't going to appeal to everyone. It is definitely for mature audiences with it's strong language, mild nudity and adult themes, yet it feels much more like an R Rated Kevin Smith movie, rather than some sub par erotica. As such is well worth a look if you are something which is a bit more outrageous and adult orientated than your usual reads.

SMALL PRESS SPOTLIGHT

We look at 3 books being released at Thought Bubble 2019

Mike Sambrook and Rosie Packwood's **The Incredible Bun** sees a giant rabbit heading to the city and becoming embroiled in the animal fighting world. After an excellent opening chapter this second issue is much more event focused as we start with a training montage (which is told brilliantly across a double page spread), before Bun is pitted against the powerful Vex - a fox like creature with a hidden secret. Bun then gets dragged further into the sleazy under belly of his manager's world and from that point on he must decide where his priorities lie.

With the characters firmly in place, Sambrook and Packwood are able to really make the most of building a story about the big fight atmosphere. However this is much more than just Rocky with rabbits, they also manage to give the story a real heart and depth to it, despite Bun being completely mute.

Alongside the cutesy animals and over the top action there is also a dark heart to it, which gives it the kind of edge and depth that the animated Watership Down had (and also inspired so many childhood nightmares). While it is not as dark as some of Madius' books, it manages to tread a delicate line between cutesy and edgy which stops it from being too schmaltzy and goofy, but stops short of going too full on and graphic at the same time.

Packwood's artwork feels much more confident this issue. You get the feeling that she really knows the world that Bun is set in now and it means the comic is much stronger as a result. The colours especially are out of this world, giving it a slightly vintage feel to it, which goes well with the purple and orange theme which seems to permeate throughout the book.

With a final twist which hints at a new direction for upcoming issues Sambrook and Packwood have taken what could have been a really cheesy giant bunny story and turned into something really top class. **Purchase The Incredible Bun #2 from www.madiuscomics.co.uk**

Matt Garvey continues his one man mission to bombard us with every conceivable kind of comic, and this month he has a crack at all ages horror with **Camp Bleh!** A homage to classic slasher movies, as well as creepy ghost stories, Camp Bleh sees a group of kids on a summer camp sat around a camp fire telling a creepy story. But in the woods there is an actual bogeyman coming to get them. However as the story evolves, so too does the monster in the woods. It's a really smart balance of knowing horror references (Dracula, Wolf Man, Friday 13th etc.) but without going too overboard and scary at the same time. There is enough detail for older kids to get something out of, but it is also tame enough that it could be read by the right younger reader as well (Parental discretion being advised for really young readers). This kid friendly horror is helped by some fun and colourful artwork from Rosie Hague. She gives the characters a cartoonish feel which felt a bit like Hamish Steele's work, while also giving the monsters a really smart, albeit very conventional and classic look - and without too much gore or scariness as well. While it's perhaps a little bit light on content for adults, for kids this is not bogged down by being too clever or too knowing and is all the better for it. **Pick up Camp Bleh from mattgarvey.bigcartel.com/**

Mat Greaves' caffeine addicted, sleep-deprived journo **Chip McFitz** is back in **Joint Fever**. After seeing a public information film on the dangers of marijuana he heads undercover to investigate the lure of the demon weed and sees himself embark on a tripped out journey around the LA jazz clubs and the city's seedy underbelly.

Greaves does a fantastic job of parodying those 50s drug films that were designed to scare the youth 'straight'. It mixes in nicely with the pulp noir stylings of the previous McFitz books that feels like something from a vintage paperback - but with the surreal humour of an Adult Swim animation. It's like a mix of Fritz the Cat, Cheech and Chong and Adventure Time. Greaves animation inspired style gives the characters a unique but very expressive appearance and he mixes that in with some awesome psychedelic visuals, as well as a flashback to Chips time in the army, as McFitz becomes hooked on the demon weed. Another addictive read! **Pick up Chip McFitz from gumroad.com/matgreaves**

"It's the Glastonbury of comics, with a real emphasis on creators"

Alex Thomas looks back at the **Thought Bubble Comic Festival 2019**

The Thought Bubble Comic Festival is the highlight of the comic convention calendar. It's the Glastonbury of comics, with an emphasis on creators rather than cosplay and celebrities. With many of the comics we review in this section debuting at this year's event we start by taking a look back at what happened at this year's show:

This years Thought Bubble festival saw it move from its traditional home of Leeds to the picturesque spa town of Harrogate. Arriving at the Harrogate Conference centre on the Saturday there was no concern about a lack of punters for this new venue, as the 4 deep queue that snaked around the building clearly meant these comic fans were not going to be put off by recent flooding and transport problems in the area. With the conference centre located in the very heart of this gorgeous city, there was a nice mix of hardcore comic fans and the odd cosplayer who was there to give the event some much needed colour but not dominate proceedings.

Comics, comics, everywhere!

As we entered the main ComiXology hall we were hit by the sheer scale of the venue and the convention as a whole. With four rows of tables and decent sized aisles for people to move around in, the hall was packed and was buzzing with excitement even before those queuing had been let in.

Doing a lap to get our bearings was not easy. Not only did we keep bumping into familiar faces but the venue was just huge and after getting our bearings in one hall we realised this was just one of three that make up the show! Moving into the second room, (the Ask For Mercy hall) it was as big again and packed with even more fantastic creators – at least they were in the same hall as the cafe and so we were able to grab a brew and plan our day! As we went in search for coffee, we poked our head into the third hall, aka the Pride Hall, and realised there were yet more tables and exhibitors and suddenly the scale of the day

really hit us and we knew we were in for a daunting task to catch up with everyone we wanted to see!

Because of the linear nature of the centre, as the event doors opened up fans and started to filter in those in the ComiXology hall had first pick of the eager fans - especially the Etherington Brothers who were front and centre – and so it was quite quiet in the other halls for most of the morning. However, creators like Andy Conduit Turner told us this wasn't stopping people from buying and he'd had a few early sales!

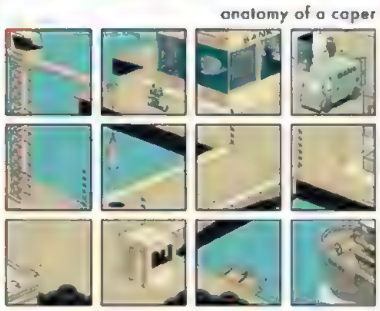
During the day we caught with so many fantastic creators that we can't mention them all here (read our full report at **pipedreamcomics.co.uk/show-report-thought-bubble-2019/**) However, our highlights of the day included: the irrepressible Matt Garvey and artist J Michael Totti who was there with the new issue of Prey For us,; Gustaffo Vargas who was there with his new South American cyberpunk issues Manu; Neil Slorance who was there with the excellent Pirate Fun; the whole Madius Comics team, Rob Jones, Mike Sambrook, Rosie Packwood and the ever-present Rory Donald; Bryony Evans from Wine and Zine; Kat, David,and Ricky from Avery Hill Publishing; Comics Laureate Hannah Berr who we met for the first time; and last but by no means least, the fantastic Pete and Maria Hoey from Coin Op Comics, who had travelled all the way from New York to bring their new comic to Thought Bubble. Coin Op #8 was a gloriously clever and beautiful to look at hardcover book which felt like a sublime mix of illustration and comics and was perhaps our favourite discovery of the day. As was their table which was covered with comics designed to look like old 45 records.

"Fans weren't put off by flooding or transport problems as they queued round the block"

Pause for thought

As we headed back to our hotel exhausted and our bag bulging with great new comics, we reflected on what a fantastic day it had been. With events going on that evening, and all day on the Sunday as well, we had barely scratched the surface of what was on offer at this fantastic show. There were dozens of creators we had not been to see properly and many we didn't even find (we just saw them posting on Twitter and Instagram later!) There were panels which we had not been to and a glorious city which we had only had a brief glimpse of.

A comic convention can be made or broken by its location, and so we hope that this move to Harrogate is the start of a brighter bolder future for Thought Bubble. Based on what we saw at our first Thought Bubble, this was one which can only get bigger and better.



The use of unconventional layouts and pages structures free really unique

Coin Op Comics #8

Publisher: Coin Op Books
Writer/Artist: Peter and Maria Hoey
Price: $19.95 from coinopbooks.com

One of our favourite discoveries at Thought Bubble was Peter and Maria Hoey's incredible Coin op Comics, a series which will make you look at comics in a completely new light.

Coin Op Comics #8 comes to you in a glorious hard cover format and is a collection of 4 short stories (and some beautiful musician profiles), which in this issue have the common theme of infatuation. It's an eclectic bunch, with no real obvious story or narrative, but each one feels like an exploration of the issue's theme as well as how comics are told. It's a book which straddles the twin towers of comics and art books, but with a heavy lean towards the latter. It reminded us a lot of Daniel Clowes in terms of it's style and it's esoteric outlook, but it also feels like something quite contemporary like Jon McNaught's Kingdom with it's ambitious use of panels and design.

Opening chapter Rear View Mirror sees recurring characters Saltz and Pepz retelling the Orpheus and Eurydice story, but with the back drop of a 30s Art Deco Jazz cartoon. The second, is a strange rambling story about a recurring dream and is told using panels that run from top to bottom as well as left to right which gives the story a disorientating pattern that goes with the dreamlike theme. Perhaps our favourite of the bunch is Intersection, which is a really smart 'what if' story that follows a man who wishes he had met his wife earlier in life – but when he is given the chance to do that it sees his life take a very different turn to the one he had hoped for. The final story Anatomy of a Caper is perhaps the most conceptually ambitious, but also the most esoteric. It is a simple story of a bank heist told across 4 pages where a single image is spilt into 12 panels. The framing then stays the same and the caper plays out within the panels of the page. It's a really clever idea and works perfectly for a simple story like this.

"A wonderfully clever and original read, that is very carefully considered and compiled"

Overall, Coin Op Comics is a wonderfully clever and original read, that is very carefully considered and compiled. The use of unconventional layouts and storytelling techniques is incredibly slick and the high stylised artwork, which varies subtly from story to story, works seamlessly within each page. At nearly $20 plus shipping for UK readers it is not the cheapest of reads, but it is well worth it if you can find a copy.

(Try Gosh Comics for issue #8 or get an anthology of previous issues that is available on Amazon).

Glorious Wrestling Alliance: Premium Edition

Publisher: Josh Hicks
Writer/Artist: Josh Hicks
Price: £12 from www.cpebooks.co.uk

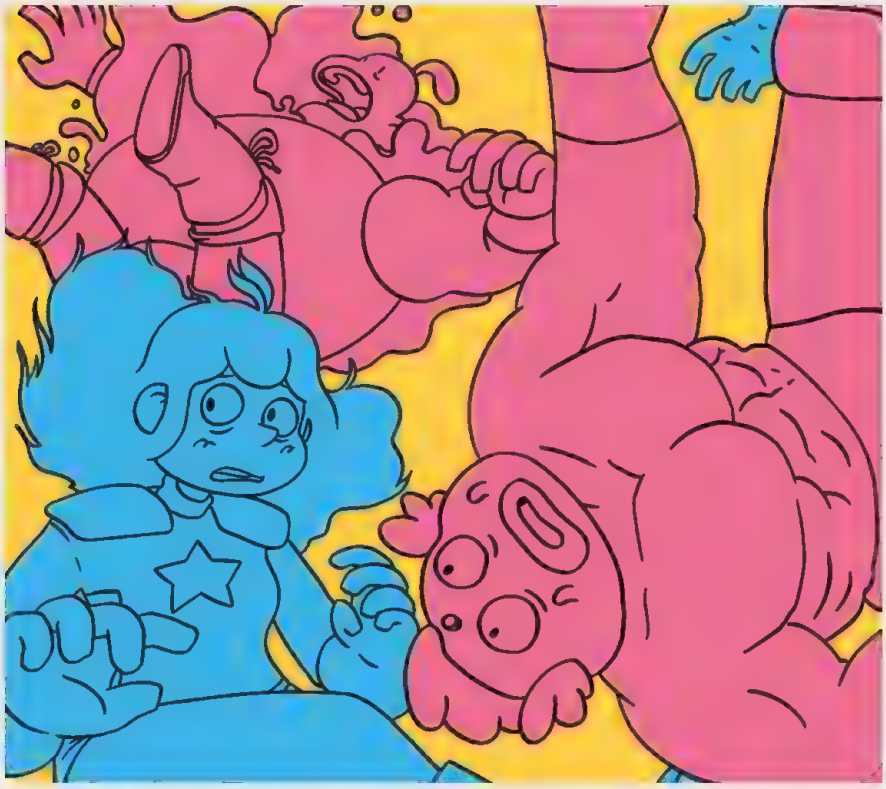
If you thought you had seen it all in the over the top world of professional wrestling, then think again. Josh Hick's stellar series takes the antics of a bunch 80s pro wrestlers and gives them a quirky small press makeover.

The heroes in GWA are not your usual muscled up stereotypes, instead you get character like Carpman (a fish based fighter who is plagued with guilt about his position on the card); Death Machine (a bruising heavyweight who also writes poetry); and the human gravy boat, who is constantly trying to make it big despite his obvious flaws!

While Josh brings his love and passion for pro wrestling to the project, he also brings a gloriously surreal sense of humour to it as well. Each chapter is based loosely on a wrestling concept - the supercard, the tour bus and the struggling business - but really each chapter is a series of character based skits where Hicks gets to riff on the weird world he has created. As well as telling some genuinely enjoyable stories too.

His artwork is gloriously simple yet effortlessly cool. His cartoonish style gives the characters the perfect look for over the top wrestlers but also means they can happily co-exist in a world where a fish-man is the champ! Meanwhile his smart panel designs (such as the tour bus in chapter two) give it all a very smartly designed feel.

While you don't have to be a wrestling fan to enjoy GWA, if you are then it is packed full of obscure references and subtle in jokes. But don't worry, it's not all there is to this book. GWA is a champion example of how to make a truly heavyweight wrestling comic!



Zoot! #3

Publisher: Hotel Fred Press
Writer/Artist: Roger Langridge
Price: £5 from hotelfred.bigcartel.com

Roger Langridge's annual anthology features his characters Fred the Clown, McGonnagal the Worlds Worst Poet, Art D'Ecco and the Hump and the Fez in a rip roaring collection of laugh out loud strips that mix the retro styling of The Chap and the anarchic humour of Viz.

This new selection of stories feels like a glorious statement of intent from one of our new favourite creators. It has hints of the anarchic spirit of Ken Reid, the immaculate simplicity of Bill Watterson, and the pulp sensibilities of Nick Prolix. Meanwhile the humour ranges from the smart to the surreal to just down right nutty. Art D'Ecco and The Hump get caught in a party full of smiling butlers, while McGonagal relives the moment he was stitched up by a theatre impresaario, and then the Fez... well, he just does what he does!

The whole thing is framed by scenes involving an insomniac Roger struggling getting ideas for stories which introduces each chapter. It gives the issue a fantastic structure, and allows Roger the chance to pause for breath between the outrageous antics of his main characters.

House of Sweets

Publisher: Cabal Comics
Writer: Fraser Campbell
Artist: Iain Laurie
Price: Coming soon to Kickstarter

Fraser Campbell and Iain Laurie's twisted revenge thriller The Edge Off was one of our highlights of last year, and this fantastic pairing have reunited for House Of Sweets.

House of Sweets has elements of The Shining, Grimm's Fairytale, Lovecraft and the Evil Dead, all in one creepy cottage. Hans and his sister Netha are heading out into the woods to find an old cabin they knew when they were kids. Hans is trying to get away and write, while his sister is trying to get away from personal troubles. Once in the cabin, past demons begin to haunt and torment them and their dark secrets return. While perhaps not as instant as The Edge Off, House of Sweets is still a gloriously dark and twisted fairytale which has a really tragic vein running through it. Campbell's use of rhyming couplets and a poetic cadence give it a dream like, fairy tale quality, which Laurie turns into a nightmare . It's not always the easiest of reads, but these two have a unique style of comic creation that is dark and unsettling, but also completely absorbing.

The Exchange #1

Publisher: Madius Comics
Writer: Mike Sambrook, Rob Jones
Artist: Liam Hill
Price: £5 from www.madiuscomics.co.uk

Joining The Incredible Bun on Madius Comics table at Thought Bubble was The Exchange. A strange and surreal tale of a cultural exchange between two teachers, that is nowhere near as dull as that might sound!

Clive is a downtrodden teacher who lives with his mother, and one night while lamenting his lack of a social life he browses the internet for a new job and is greeted with a message from the people of Old Queensdock who are looking for an exchange. Little does he know when he agrees to this, is that Old Queensdock is not your average town and it's inhabits live by the mantra of "don't act weird!" – and with good reason!

On the surface, The Exchange might not have an obvious hook – it's cover is fairly minimal and it's synopsis is deliberately vague. But that's because hiding beneath the unassuming façade is a gloriously strange and downright bonkers book.

Surreal swap shop

The opening chapters with Clive teaching feel like they have stepped out of a Todd Oliver book with its over the top characterisation and dysfunctional visuals. Whereas the residents of Old Queensdock feel like they have come from an episode of Adventure Time – if it had been drawn by Iain Laurie. They are a strange and weird bunch of misfits, but there is something sinister hiding underneath the quirkiness. It's all rendered in a glorious neon fused pink and blue colour scheme which makes the whole thing feel even more otherworldly but really eye catching and fresh at the same time.

While the visuals from newcomer Liam Hill will be the first thing you notice, the dialogue that is hiding underneath those weird images is just as funny. It has that classic

Sambrook and Jones sarcasm and surreal-ness that we have loved in Papercuts and Inkstains, and the little asides and snippets of dialogue help make the book much more than just a bunch of surreal images. It gives it that readability factor which is key to making a book like this work.

Along with the aforementioned The Incredible Bun, The Exchange feels like a real step up in quality for the Madius team – as well as an interesting new direction. They both have a real confidence to the writing and the concept, that is then allowing them to take more risks with the artwork. As a result, they are making books which feel really different and fresh and give Madius a new identity.

Both books feel very accessible and like they could be all-ages, but there is also something simmering just under the surface which means you probably shouldn't be showing it to really young kids – although we're not sure why yet!

The Exchange is a really assured and confident read from a publisher on the rise, and this is a book that will delight and baffle you in equal measures. (And when you go and get your copy from them, remember the Queensdock mantra, and don't act weird!)

"Details are what gives that extra bit to your world building and gives them a spicy plausibility"

Gustaffo Vargas on creating cyborg jungle creatures for **MANU**

We checked out Gustaffo varga's awesome Peruvian sci-fi thriller Manu last issue, but at Thought Bubble we caught up with it's creator to find out more about it's creation:

Can you tell us a bit about the inspiration and story behind MANU
Gustaffo Vargas: By the beginning of 2014 I wanted to tell a science fiction story based in PERU. Then I realised I wanted to make a cyberpunk story, and as soon as I decided what elements I wanted to use the place where it would happen came to me rapidly (Trujillø).

The idea of making books that happen in real places came naturally. So the next story after Trujillø was L1MA, which is the capital city, my city. This was a new story, the only thing I knew in the beginning was, I want to tell a story with street kids (pirañas), black vultures that happens in Lima. It is a love letter to my city, in my own way. L1MA was released in Thought Bubble 2018.

Following that came MANU, which is not a city, but is a geographic area, a National Park in the Peruvian Rainforest. MANU is volume 1 of 3 of the ALTIPLANO saga, it explores some themes I started working already in L1MA.

All my stories happen in the same world, so little by little, characters and elements connect or cross paths more.

What inspired you to mix sci fi and South American jungles together?
GV: I wanted to explore what I knew and where I came from, go deeper in my own culture, I think it's a territory that is so rich! In Anime you have really varied stories and they use their culture and folklore in very different and creative ways. The ideas and visuals are amazingly rich and that's when it hit me. In Peru (and all South America) we have such rich and fascinating cultures, maybe I should explore Peru with that kind of vision.

Gustaffo's unique world in Manu was inspired by the cultrual heritage of his native Peru

MANU is much longer than those first two books, were there any challenges to writing a longer story?
GV: L1MA and Trujillø are fast roller coasters that go from A to B. I wanted to do a bigger and more ambitious story. It was not easy, I had to prepare a Mind Map and small events cards to make all the elements work.

Which of your characters has been your favourite to draw ?
GV: I think I have fun with almost all of them, the kids, the dogs, the vultures, the cyborgs, they all serve to tell the story. The more complex designs can be a pain, but they are worth it. The jaguar in MANU and all the monkeys were a bit of a challenge, but they were fun too. Those details are what gives that extra bit to your world building and gives them that extra spicy plausibility you're trying to achieve.

Get MANU, Trujillø and L1MA from gustaffovargas.bigcartel.com/

"I hope the reader will gain some enlightenment into how it feels to be in a crisis."

Lucy Sullivan on the importance of mental health in **Barking**

Part of the growing collection of exciting books being released on the Unbound platform, Lucy Sullivan's Barking is a powerful look at a mental health crisis. We caught up with her to find out more.

Lucy's unique approach to her artwork helps to reflect the chaotic nature of the story

Barking feels like a very personal story, is it based on your own experiences or people you know?
Lucy Sullivan: It's a combination. I had a mental health crisis in my 20s after my dad died suddenly. It wasn't clear that was what was happening to me at the time and it took a catastrophic night out for it to become clear and I got help.

When I subsequently saw friends go through a similar ordeal, but they were also sectioned, it threw a sharp light on the persisting stigma around our minds and how we, as a society treat someone in that vulnerable, terrifying state.

Was it important for you to create a book which challenged rather than being a passive reading experience?
LS: The most important aspect was being honest and true to my research. I didn't intend for it to be challenging but I guess that's the nature of the topic. I did want it to feel frightening in places as that is true to the experience. I drew a lot of reference from film and TV influences such as American Werewolf in London, Dark Water and Poppy Shakespeare TV drama. There's also a fair amount of mythology & psychological theory in the mix. I hope that will make it more entertaining too but definitely in a darker way. Mostly I hope that the reader will empathise with Alix and go with her through the process and gain some enlightenment into how it feels to be in a crisis. The only real way to break the stigma is to talk openly about these topics.

You have a very unique art technique, can you tell us a bit about it?
LS: I came to comics from Hand-drawn Animation and a career teaching observational drawing. Both are definitely present in my artwork. I spent years developing the style of the book, working on it around my other jobs. I knew it had to feel both urgent and visceral so I drew the whole book with a biro or on carbon typewriter sheets. The materials themselves are messy and unruly but produce beautiful lines so felt very apt to the subject.

If you could offer any advice to anyone going through a mental health crisis what would that be?
LS: Tell someone. Anyone you can feel able to do so. Saying it out loud is the first step and the most powerful. You never know who might be able to help. There are lots of excellent, free services that will point you in the right direction for help such as Mind, The Samaritans or Rethink Mental Illness.

You can find out more about Barking at unbound.com/books/barking/

SMALL PRESS SPOTLIGHT

We look at more books released at Thought Bubble 2019

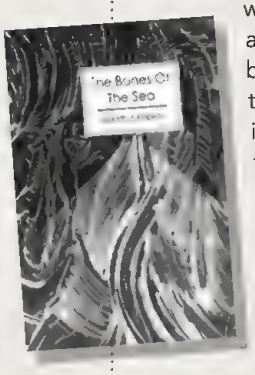
The Silent Horns is the new comic from Wine and Zine's Bryony Evans and is a wonderfully potent story about coming of age and acceptance. Yfa is a young hexerei, which is a sort of horned magical creature that looks a bit like Marko from Saga. When their horns come through, the Hexerei begin to develop magical powers, but when Yfa's horns come through her powers don't appear and so she begins to question herself and why she isn't like her friends. The Silent Horns is a beautifully told coming age story, that has real heart and emotional depth to it. On the surface it is your classic puberty analogy, with the horns being representative of any number of teenage changes. Yet it feels like it could be so much more than that – especially for a teen who is looking for more – i.e. anything to do with gender or sexuality. The Silent Horns is relevant to a wide range of teen dilemmas, without ever diluting its message, and so the amount a reader gets out of it, is up to their own situation. (There is even something there for the parents, which is a lot of what we got out of the book.) As well as being a wonderfully written story, Silent Horns looks gorgeous too. Bryony's artwork is packed full of expressive characters who have a real sense of dynamism, which is no surprise considering her animation background. They are rendered in a beautiful monochrome pencil shading style which gives the story a fantastic texture that really suits the quite organic, fantasy nature of story. **Buy The Silent Horns from wineandzine.bigcartel.com**

In **Golf Girl**, our heroine Becky Jones is your average sixteen year old, balancing family life, school and a job she hates. But in Becky's case that means working at the rather tedious Golf World, which isn't ideal for someone who hates golf. Especially when she is possessed by the spirit of an alien entity who gives her golf based super powers. It also sets her on a course against the mysterious paramilitary scientists of ReaLabs. (Who aren't a gym!)

While some of this may sound all very serious, Golf Girl is a book which is played more for laughs than drama. From the first page and the debut of a recurring joke about a seagull stealing chips (to that gag about ReaLabs) it is a genuine laugh out loud read. And recurring jokes are definitely a theme: from the seagulls, to Becky's constant put downs about people who like golf. It's a wonderfully witty and frequently funny read, and one which is definitely pushed along by its characters rather than the action.

It reminded us of Giant Days and the way John Allison builds stories around dialogue and character – but also fleshes the whole thing out with unlikely side stories. In Golf Girl it's the spritegeist and ReaLabs which gives the book it's background plot, but really it's all about the characters. With so much emphasis on character, the actual narrative parts of the story (i.e the appearance of the spirtegeist and ReaLabs) feels a bit shunted to the end of the book like an after thought. However, when you have had so much quality character work, we forgive this slight imbalance.
Find out more at charty.co.uk/

The Bones of the Sea is the new book from Petrichor's Gareth A. Hopkins and continues his unique approach to comics. His mix of personal reflection and abstract images build these wonderful visual pieces which are strangely readable despite their unconventional style. This issue is built around two strands of thought: Hopkins musings on his family as he waits for his son in a car park; and also on the decaying body of a blue whale. It is the latter which seems to inform the visuals (and gives this book it's name) as the shapes Gareth has created have a flowing almost tentacle like appearance to them, as well as feeling like waves crashing on the sea, or indeed like the decaying bones of a giant sea mammal. Unlike his previous work, this perhaps gives a more immediate visual connection to the words, but that connection is not necessary to get the most out of Hopkins work. Hopkins has developed and evolved his style to be about a long term journey for his art, as much as it is about creating individual comics. However, by accident or design the images for Bones of The Sea feel like a much more coherent set when contrasted with the words – while still remaining completely unique in their approach.
Purchase Bones of the Seas for £4 at grthink.bigcartel.com/



Sequential Empathy

The Unflinching yet Sensitive Flourishing of Mental Health in Indie Comics: Part 2

In comparison to the slice-of-life vibes of Brain Shoodles, Worry Wart and Wired Up Wrong that we saw last issue, other indie comics with a mental health slant have an aesthetic that's as far detached from reality as possible. The War for Kaleb and Tales of the Fractured Mind reach for the skies and the stars respectively by weaving science fiction and fantasy into their mental illness depictions. By retreating from reality into fantasy, Jason Pittman, Roddy McCance and Roland Kalnins conjure up lavish and surreal explorations into mental illness, distinct from Emily, Rachael and Dani's works.

Anxious Superheroes

The War for Kaleb by writer & artist Jason Pittman is a rather deliberate attempt at communicating with his own demons. The three-issue series, now available as a collected trade paperback, follows the aforementioned Kaleb as his feelings of severe anxiety manifest into a duo of super-powered beings, one heroic and one evil, and proceed to clash with each other. "After failed attempts at helping myself, and my anxiety, I went to looking for answers through art, and storytelling, by translating those images in my head to paper," explains Pittman. "Years later, I have The War for Kaleb."

The War for Kaleb liberally exploits the panel structure of a comic to show the overwrought feelings anxiety can bring. Its near-total black-and-white appearance feels stripped back and impactful, rather than unfinished and cold, assisted by Pittman's intensely detailed illustrations of characters, landscapes and architecture. The manifestations themselves are the only points in the comic where colour is used to illustrate them. As the

WHY THE HELL DID I LET HIM GET TO ME? FIGURE I WOULD BE USED TO HIM.
THIS IS SO STUPID. NOW THAT I'M CALM, I KNOW WHAT I DID WAS WRONG, BUT I CAN NEVER SEE PAST THE MOMENT.
LUCKY I DIDN'T GET FIRED.
NITRO THUNDER
PARK
WHY AM I UNEASY ALL TIME?
I KNOW MEDICINE IT, BUT SUCH A CONCEPT.

The War For Kaleb uses colour and black and white to show it's character's mental state

only points of colours in the book, they instantly catch the reader's eye, highlighting the tangible grip anxiety can have. "Once bouts of anxiety come, and settle in, there are very few things to convince myself that everything was okay. It was like something took over to make me a different person, and I couldn't listen to my regular self anymore. It isn't bipolar, though. Because there is always something in the back of my mind wanting to stop, but it just doesn't." That attention to detail in The War for Kaleb's visuals feels like a tense, underlying reflection of the anxiety Kaleb experiences throughout the story. Whether such

an observation is genuine or not, it still points to The War for Kaleb is a rich, robust likeness of anxiety and depression, visually and narratively.

Fractured Minds

By comparison, Tales of the Fractured Mind adopts a monsoon-esque set of visual moods and stretches beyond depictions of anxiety and depression. Each of the anthology's seven strips covers a specific mental illness, including bi-polar disorder and dementia. Roddy and Rolands task themselves with no easy mission of giving a visual voice to numerous complicated illnesses, yet several strips succeed in harnessing the raw mental state of these illnesses. 'Clock of the World' makes use of split panels to illustrate dual personalities. 'War on Reality' gives a sparse relationship between language and shape, often featuring speech separate from the visuals, as if they're illustrating post-traumatic stress by highlighting the soldier's separation between reality and themselves. The neon-soaked colours of 'Mountaineering' feels like a less-than-subtle comment on the jungle-wading attitude to making sense of gender dysphoria.

"I felt like it was important to include many different sides of mental illness, that's why each story is different," explains Roddy. "Each story is like a 4 minute song. They are short and sharp and there to pick you up, make you understand something or to just make you feel something." Rolands brings a swarming, nightmare-ish vibe to the anthology, a style that haunts and engulf the comic's strips; "Depicting the illnesses wasn't too hard in the design sense, but taking those stories and drawing the pages... I had to go into a special mental state for each of them. Because I tried to put myself into each of those situations presented. It took a toll on me emotionally. Sounds a bit sad or morbid but it was an amazing experience. So each of those stories has a piece of 'Me' in them." An intimate unboxing for such a sweeping collection of ideas and illnesses. Even with Tales of the Fractured Mind's sense of scale separating it from Rachael's or Emily's works, we find ourselves slipping back to the mentality of Wired Up Wrong and Brain Shoodles; the idea of placing the creator firmly into the DNA of the comic, no matter how far-flung the story itself may be.

Roddy McCance's anthology gives a visual voice to a number of complex conditions

"THEIR EXUBERANT ATTITUDE IN UTILISING OTHER-WORLDLY CONCEPTS TEARS DOWN THE TOXIC MISCONCEPTIONS"

What still makes The War for Kaleb and Tales of the Fractured Mind distinct from past works and compatible with each other is their exuberant attitude in utilising other-worldly concepts to tear down the toxic misconceptions around mental illnesses. It's less of a mask, more of a platform to emphasis the pain felt by having these illnesses, giving them a tangibility that allows for a piercing clawing at the reader.

Next month: Mental Health Zines

"This year's 'Troobs' was all about positivity towards comics"

Alex Thomas looks back at the **True Believers Comic Festival 2020**

We usually begin our annual True Believers Comic Festival show report with a grumble about the weather. However for one glorious weekend this February, the heavens shone on the geeks of the south west and we were able to make our journey to Cheltenham without having to battle snow or rain storms!

The traditional curtain raiser of the UK convention season, True Believers (aka Troobs) is now in its second year at Cheltenham's Jury's Inn. It's a fantastic venue for a convention as it has that old school vibe to it. The venue allows for the comics area and cosplay to be split, meaning the comics hall isn't filled with selfie taking teens and the cosplayers aren't constantly being glared at by disgruntled small pressers for blocking their tables. The two flow from one to the other, and with the event taking over the whole of the ground floor of the hotel it means everything is nicely spread out, without areas getting lost (as happened at the old race course venue). You also get the experience of seeing a bunch of League Two footballers or hung over hen partiers attempting to negotiate the convention floor while checking out!

True Believers has always been an incredibly small press friendly event and this year it was perhaps even more so. With the 'big name guests' just being regulars Mike Collins, Dylan Teague and The Beano's Laura Howell it was time for the indie scene to shine. There was a host of familiar faces exhibiting including: indie comic of the year winner Gustaffo Vargas showcasing with MANU; Matt Hardy and Russell Olson with their new all ages gender flipped take on Sherlock Holmes – A Study in Scarlet; NPC Tea's Sarah Millman who had just launched the Kickstarter for a new collected volume; and for the first time in ages the team from Big Punch Studios, with their continued plans for world domination, including revamped Sandwich Masters, plus more Afterlife Inc and Cat and Meringue comics.

TBCF
TRUE BELIEVERS COMIC FESTIVAL 2020
PRESS PASS
TRUE BELIEVERS COMIC FESTIVAL
TBCF
LEARN TO DRAW THE INCREDIBLE HULK with MIKE COLLINS
MINI-COMIC WORKSHOP with PETE TAYLOR
WEAPONS OF CHOICE PANEL with NICK PROUD, RUSSELL MARK OLSON, GUSTAFFO VARGAS and ADAM HALF
LEARN TO DRAW DENNIS THE MENACE with LAURA HOWELL
CREATE A WANTED POSTER with RUSSELL MARK OLSON
SUPERHERO LIFE DRAWING with I AM ZOOT
COSPLAY CATWALK
CHARITY RAFFLE
DEVELOP AN IDEA INTO A STORY with SAM
TROOBS 2020 CLOSES
GL - GARDEN LOUNGE PR - PANEL ROOM

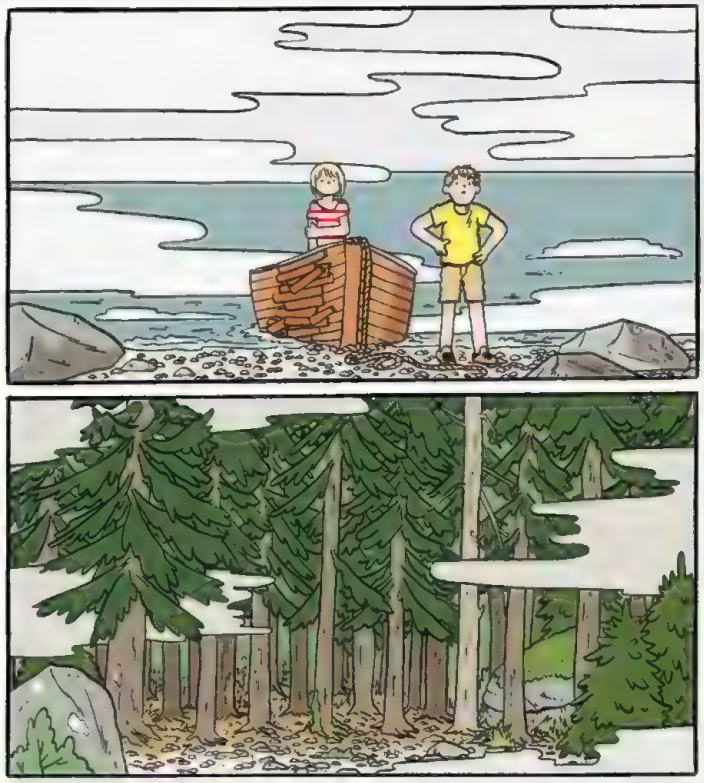
Small press steps ups

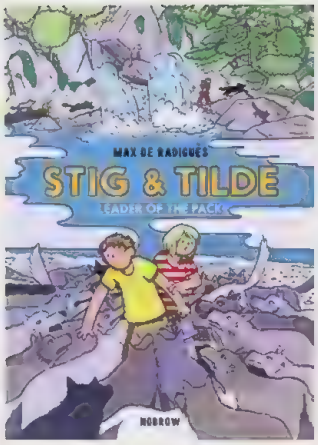
Also on the day we caught up with John Tucker (The King), Gav and Emily Mitchell (Rum Row, Brain Shoodles), Nick Bryan (Catalyst), Samuel George London (Project Hoax), Dave West (Accent UK), Pete Taylor (The Seven Sagas of Silverbeard), Dan Harris (The Cosplayer That Doomed The Earth), Dan Butcher (Vanguard), Vince Hunt (Awesome Comics) and Rich Carrington (Mahoney's) and more!

While this year's show was a bit quieter than previous events, this was still a fantastic comics focused day out. While we could complain about the fact there weren't many really big name guests, and some tables said they had a relatively quiet day, the overall sense of this year's Troobs was of positivity towards comics. Everyone was in fantastic spirits and were looking forward to checking out new books from their peers.

If every comic convention was run like this, then UK comic scene would be in very fine health indeed, as we could not ask for a better comics based day!

You can find out more about the True Believers Comic Festival at www.oktrue-believers.com





Max de Radigués' castaway siblings find themselves faced with the very real threat of an island full of wolves!

Stig and Tilde: Leader of the Pack

Publisher: Nobrow Press
Writer/Artist: *Max de Radigués'*
Price: £9.99 from nobrow.net

The second volume of Max de Radigués' Stig and Tilde tales sees a pair teenage castaways landing on a fresh island and looking to fight off a pack of hungry wolves in order to survive and make it back home.

The world of Stig and Tilde is one that can only really exist in a work of fiction. These plucky teens are sent off by their parents for a 'kulku' – a traditional rite of passage that sees the youngsters required to spend a bit of time being self sufficient in the wilderness. In the modern world, this would never happen due to parental neuroticism and health and safety, yet in the nostalgic/idealised world of de Radigués' story it all makes perfect sense to let kids go off in a boat alone for weeks or months at a time!

While you are required to make a bit of a leap of faith as a reader, what it does allow, is room for de Radigués to tell his coming of age story as the twins fend for themselves on various islands. There is enough peril that you want them to survive and return home as quickly as possible, but there is not so much tragedy that it bogs down the story and makes it maudlin or too angsty. After successfully evading the attentions of 'lunatic poltergeist' Arne in volume 1 (Vanisher's Island), they have repaired their broken boat and manage to limp on to the next island where they are set upon by some wolves and meet an enigmatic hermit.

This is one of those series that is utterly charming and completely absorbing in every respect. The story is gloriously told, meandering from one exploit to the other, while at the same time referring back to previous events and slowly building up the back story. It's also not afraid to give the story some edge, with the wolves in particular being a very real threat and not a cutesy diversion.

"The idealised and nostalgic world of Stig and Tilde is one that can only exist in a work of fiction"

As you would expect with a Nobrow book it looks splendid. De Radigués' style has the polish of a classic bande desinée, but the cartoon-ish qualities of Hamish Steele's Deadendia. The locations are beautifully rendered, while his figure work is classical, yet packed with personality and has a beautifully muted colour scheme.

If you love the Hilda books and can't wait for the next volume, this is a more than capable stop gap. Like a Franco Belgian Lumberjanes mixed with a classic kids adventure like Swallows and Amazons, but with a generous dose of Scandi chic, this is an utterly sublime book that will make you want to head our on your own adventure!

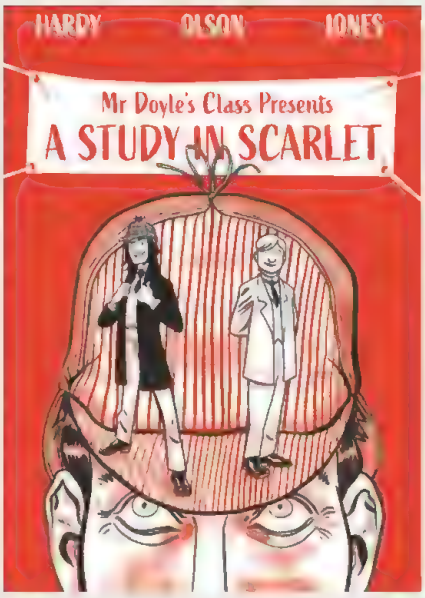
Mr Doyle's Class Presents A Study in Scarlet

Publisher: Portsmouth City Council
Writer: Matt Hardy
Artist: Russell Mark Olson, Rob Jones
Price: £13 from www.visitportsmouth.co.uk/conandoyle/social-media/shop

One of our most eagerly anticipated comics for 2020, Mr Doyle's Class Presents A Study in Scarlet sees Matt Hardy (Murder Most Mundane) team up with Russell Mark Olson (Gateway City) to bring us a unique all ages take on the first Sherlock Holmes story.

A Study in Scarlet cleverly re-imagines this classic mystery as a school play. The roles are taken on by the students (including a young girl taking in the main part – much to the chagrin of her peers) with their teacher Mr Doyle over-seeing the action.

While an obvious choice in terms of the sequence of Holmes stories, it's not the most immediate of reads, as Doyle had not yet established the conventions of his hero at this point. However, Hardy and Olson tweak and amend the structure of the story to make the whole thing much more familiar. The concept is your classic closed room murder with Holmes dissecting the clues around him. Hardy and Olson stick faithfully to the plot of the original, if not the structure, and it's better for it. In a lot of ways the adaptation is treated like an analysis of the story as much as it is a re-telling. While this helps make sense of this story, it is not the most



instant of reads – especially if you are expecting it to be a conventional crime procedural. However, if you're not a Holmes devotee, we found a quick read of Wikipedia helped get us up to speed and suddenly it all fell into place.

One thing we were always sure about was how it looks – which is absolutely incredible. As huge fans of Russell's work on Gateway City, we knew this would be a perfect fit and his work doesn't disappoint. The way he goes from Victorian inspired street scenes to the school play to the flashbacks is exquisite. His characterisation gives every page an energy and a vibrancy that really captures the enthusiasm of the kids, yet he manages to also capture the gravitas of the more serious moments. It has a very European feel to it, with bags of energy and exuberance and that mix of cartooning and realism create a very stylised piece.

This is an outstanding piece of work that deserves to be on shelves in comic and book shops alike. It adapts the story in a really smart and informed way and by the end of reading it you feel entertained and educated in equal measures. Case solved!

Finger Guns

Publisher: Vault Comics
Writer: Justin Richards
Artist: Val Halvorson, Rebecca Nalty (Colours), Taylor Esposito (Lettering)
Price: £2.49 from ComiXology

Vault Comics continue their fine form of 2019, with this tale of a pair of high school kids who develop powers that they exhibit by pointing their fingers at people (i.e. making 'finger guns').

While the concept may seem tenuous, this first issue is a lot of fun. Richards and Halvorson build a story which has elements of classic superhero origins, and teen angst, but deliver it in a packaged that is packed full of delicious self awareness that reminded us of the excellent Sex Criminals, but less x-rated! They turn what could be a one note joke into a really well told and constructed story – with plenty of room for development and enough character depth to make it plausible.

It's helped by some exquisite artwork from Halvorson which has a cartoon-ish quality mixed with a very contemporary sense of design and style, including some lush colours from Rebecca Nalty.

This is one of those books which, based on it's initial premise shouldn't work – but it somehow does!

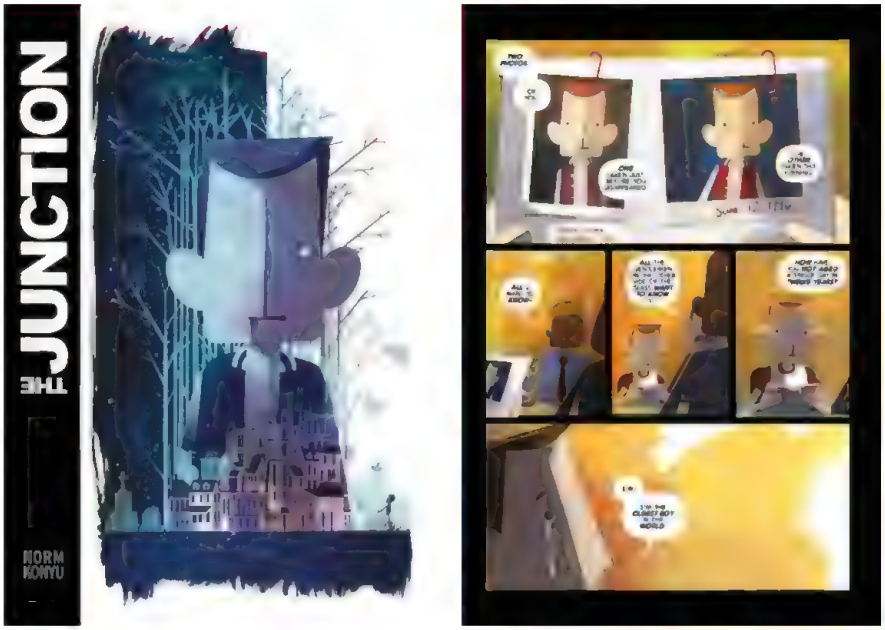
"Emotions drive stories... whether the emotion is grief, fear, love, or anger. "

Norm Konyu explains his debut graphic novel **The Junction**

A boy goes missing and returns home 12 years later, having not aged. This strange concept is the heart of Norm Konyu's The Junction, which is currently funding on Kickstarter. We caught up with Norm to find out more about the inspiration for the book and also some of the hidden meaning within the world of Kirby Junction!

Can you tell us a bit about where the initial idea for the story came from and how it has evolved over time?
Norm Konyu: You know, I can't really pin down when the story became what it is. I do know that some of the sequences came from dreams, specifically one where I was trying to get out of an autumnal forest but the trees wouldn't let me. The story kept altering even after I was well into the artwork stage. Not very professional, or the best use of my time, but I managed to flounder my way to a cohesive story in the end.

Kirby Junction feels like a classic American Small Town, was it intended to be such an idealised version?
NK: I grew up in Canada, in a very small town in Southern Ontario. Maybe the word town is too grand a term. Cows outnumbered residents two to one. There are dozens of these sorts of towns across Ontario, little islands in farmland, but many of them don't really exist in the same shape or form anymore. I feel a lot of these places have lost their individuality in the process, and I think that's what I was harking back to with Kirby Junction – a town of the past viewed through the distorting lens of nostalgia.



The small town world of the Junction is based on Norm's upbringing in southern Canada

The story deals with ideas of grief and loss? Who do you think the book is aimed at?
NK: I've discussed the age range with a few people. There's none of the usual age restrictors in it: sex, swearing, or gore; but it does have some 'grown-up' themes. Definitely fine for any 12 year old, but for those younger, it depends on their maturity. The emotional story is certainly important. It's important to any story, whether the emotion is grief, fear, love, or anger. Emotions drive stories.

If you could reveal one secret or about The Junction, which people should look out for, but which doesn't spoil the story, what would that be?
NK: The town is named Kirby Junction for two reasons. The first is that my favourite childhood comics were from the mind and pencil of the brilliant Jack Kirby. The second is a bit more subtle, but if people look carefully, they just may see the reason...

The Junction is currently funding on Kickstarter and you can find out more about The Junction at junctiongraphicnovel.com

Her Prosperity

Publisher: David Taylor
Writer/Artist: David Taylor
Price: £4 from dftaylor.bigcartel.com

This is your classic revenge thriller in the reign of Death Wish or Taken, however writer/artist David Taylor adds a nice angle to this well worn format by having a female lead.

He does this without it feeling like tokenism and the titular 'Her' is a classic enigmatic investigator, who mixes strength and vulnerability well, and sets out to find a missing girl in the sleazy town of Prosperity where 'rich men go to relax from the pressures of their privilege'.

Taylor builds a smart, but unfussy story that builds slowly, revealing character bit by bit before exploding into action packed moments. It has a crime noir esque first person narrative, while the action makes it more like a 70s grindhouse movie.

If you love crime comics like Criminal or Dying Is Easy, then this is a fantastic read. It's strengths are in it's uncomplicated nature which makes it a very readable. With potential for continuing the story in other towns (it reminded us of nomadic heroes like Jack Reacher) this feels like a character and concept with plenty of miles left in the tank!

Rum Row #3

Publisher: Grenade Fight Ink
Writer: Andrew Maxwell
Artist: Gavin Mitchell, Adam Pruett
Price: £1.49 from ComiXology

Andrew Maxwell's tale of prohibition speakeasies based in airships is a book that has been under appreciate due to the length of time between issues. However with new artist Gav Mitchell (Trolltooth Wars) joining then team we're hoping this is the start of a new frequency to this excellent series.

Rum Row takes the classic conventions of prohibition-era pulp comics and transposes them to the skies, with speakeasies now in airships above the New York streets. In amongst this motley bunch of thieves and villains we meet The Captain Anne Blanchard, a female club owner who is attempting to sell plans to the NYPD's top secret Albatross to the highest bidder. all the while being pursued by Jack Tinson and the NYPD.

Issue #3 starts with a bang as Tinson and his partner are being thrown from a plane and the action doesn't let up from there. As the story builds towards the Black Auction of the Albatross plans everyone is looking to out manoeuvre each other in a classic game of cat and mouse.

Rum Row is one of those books which takes a familiar concept and gives it just enough of a tweak to make it into a truly unique idea. With this original airborne world in place, it allows Maxwell to explore a myriad of ideas within it as he has created an incredibly rich and fertile world to grow stories within.

The roster of characters that Maxwell has assembled are a superb bunch, from dastardly Oriental drug lords to mechanical Nazis and he could not have picked a better artist to bring them to life than Mitchell. Gav has taken on the reigns of Rum Row from Michele Bandini, who is off working for Marvel. He does a super job of matching Michele's polished style, but at the same time brings his own sense of character to the piece. Instead of having a slightly Oriental/Manga style to it, Gav brings a more European almost Band Dessinee feel to it (reminding us a lot of Atom Agency in places). Meanwhile his ability to mix line work and colour seamlessly (by virtue of him doing it all) gives the book a really coherent feel. It certainly allows him to bring texture and depths to scenes in a way which might not have happened with a colourist or inker who was not used to his work.

With only one issue remaining on the Black Auction plot, this is the perfect change of pace and artist needed to get this book over the line. Thanks to a strong world, a fun plot and some truly stunning artwork, Rum Row is a book which really is heading into the stratosphere!

The King

Publisher: John Tucker
Writer/Artist: John Tucker
Price: £3 at johntucker.bigcartel.com

John Tucker's new book The King does it's best to defy description with a story about a woman who inherits a giant egg from her sister. And that's all we can tell you as John has asked us not to reveal what is in the egg. But suffice to say, you'll never figure it out!

The contents of the egg take the characters on a strange and unique journey which is as bonkers as it is brilliant. The unique concept allows Tucker to create a delightfully strange world which mixes remarkably original ideas and wonderful visuals.

John tells the whole story like a children's picture book, with beautifully type set pages and a vintage hue generated by an orangey watercolour wash colour scheme, which feels like a faded Ladybird book. It perfectly compliments this nostalgic and reflective story, but also allows John to be experimental with the content as it feels like it is set in a very childlike world, where grown up restrictions no longer apply.

It's difficult to talk about The King without giving too much away, but believe us when we say it is a wonderful read, packed full of originality that is truly one of a kind.

Vanguard Volume 3

Publisher: Dan Butcher
Write/Artist: Dan Butcher
Price: £16 from www.comichaus.com

Dan Butcher's superhero webcomic Vanguard is one of the best post-modern capes comics you'll find in the UK.

Volume 3 picks up after the bloodthirsty battle that saw the original Vanguard destroyed and this new volume sees the story move forward several years to a more dystopian world where corruption and greed has been allowed to develop unchecked.

It's perfect territory for a new generation of Vanguard heroes to develop within and that is the thrust of this new volume, with much of the story built around the arrival of new hero Wolfshead. After the fairly trad superhero fare of the first volume and a half, this hits much darker territory with a book which feels much more like The Authority than The British Avengers. It has a muscular and macho approach to story telling, feeling more like a gritty action movie than a complex morality play as Dan mixes dark cyberpunk satire with violent action, and also a Celtic supernatural undercurrent to create a brilliant mix of styles. His artwork is smart and slick and perfectly suits the world he has created. While volume 3 is not always an ideal jumping on point for new readers, the way this part of the story reboots itself is a great place to begin (and then work back) as this is a series that is still on an upward trajectory to even greater heights!

Lad: The Homecoming

Publisher: Umar Ditta
Writer: Umar Ditta, Hugo Boylan (Editor)
Artist: Carlos Pedro, Kerrie Smith, Dearbhla Kelly
Price: £4 from UmarDItta.com

This is the kind of foul mouthed and sweary comic your mother warned you about. Yet it has a really dark charm that draws you in and takes you along for the ride.

'Lad' is part of 'The Family' – a kitchen sink mafia group whose patriarch, 'Dad', is found badly beaten in the forest. The family instantly go after the enigmatic Hermit, a recluse who lives in the woods, with whom they have a fragile truce base on fear and respect. However with the Uncles taking charge of things then the rules may be about to change.

On the surface Lad is your average gangster revenge thriller that we have seen in everything from the Godfather to Goodfellas, however it has a British council estate setting which gives it a freshness without turning into a Guy Ritchie-esque Mockney parody. There's also as a supernatural element thanks to the enigmatic Hermit which further separates it from the crowd.

When all these disparate elements are combined thanks to a very well considered and explained back story, and some fantastic monochrome artwork from Portuguese artist Carlos Pedro, it manages to create a really fresh and edgy crime drama. While the artwork and language can be quite raw and rough around the edges at times, it is a better book as a result of that.

Afterlife Inc: Glory Days

Publisher: Big Punch Studios
Writer: Jon Lock
Artist: Various, Lucy Lock (Letterer)
Price: £15 at www.bigpunchstudios.com

Jack Fortune and his loyal Board of Directors return in the fifth volume of Afterlife Inc: Glory Days. Set in the aftermath of their battles against the Angel Trinity and the Archangel Gabriel from volume 4, the gang attempt to take stock, heal up and rebuild their heavenly empire.

Having snatched victory from the jaws of defeat in Man Made God, it has come with a cost for our heroes as the denizens of the Empyrean have begun to question Jack and his monopolistic hold over their afterlives. Now, a new enemy appears – a competitor in the form of the ambitious Arjun Arcadia and his consultancy, White Horse. Unfortunately, while such a relatively low powered opponent might have normally been an easy day for Jack, Nuriel, Lux and co, each finds themselves facing their own demons and injuries in a way that may just result in Afterlife Inc shutting up shop.

Jon Lock's fifth instalment of Afterlife Inc. continues to be a fun and enjoyable read. However, unlike prior instalments, Glory Days feels like it is attempting to build a more overarching narrative as it feels like a bridge between volume 4 and the upcoming volume 6, rather than a standalone story. It definitely feels like a culmination of the events of Lifeblood and Man Made God with the characters feeling much more

worn down and less energised than they were at the series start. Lock appears to moving into a deeper, heavier form of storytelling as he focuses on concepts like the price of power and the difficulties of enacting change. While this is great for long time fans, it is not the best place for new readers to jump onboard!

In order to produce his books more efficiently, Lock uses a variety of fantastic artists, rather than one main collaborator, and he continues that here with series regular Jack Tempest being joined by the likes of Mark Penman (Eimurian Tales), Gavin Mitchell (Trolltooth Wars) and more. As a result, Glory Days is crammed full of gorgeous art which are nicely divided between scenes, allowing each to have the feel of its own story.

With five books (and a crossover) under his belt, Jon Lock's Afterlife Inc. continues to go from strength to strength. With a deep, engrossing story and a myriad of wonderful art filling it's pages, Glory Days not only builds on what has come before but also sets up the future to give fans something to eagerly anticipate. While the shareholders within its world may not think so, fans can rest assured that Afterlife Inc is still very much a company, and comic, you can believe in.

Crow Song

Publisher: Tony Vanraes
Writer: Various
Artist: Various
Price: contact @TonyVnrs on twitter

The knack of making a great small press anthology is not easy. Tony Vanraes's Crow Song manages to get it just right as he brings together 4 subjectively similar stories with very different art styles that really showcase the diversity of his writing.

The Immolated Lady, is a slice of high fantasy with ornate and finely detailed black and white artwork. Whereas The Contract and Hatchlings are a pair of sci-fi orientated stories, before the issue wraps up with Squires which feels more like an R-rated action adventure story and is a great contrast to he more serious previous stories.

This mix of stories and styles, allied with some truly gorgeous art makes Crow Song one of the best anthologies we have seen in ages. The quality of art and story telling is exceptional while the range of styles should be enough to satisfy most people. Unlike many anthologies where we have to pick a few stand-outs to discuss, all the stories in Crow Song are top drawer and serve as a great sample of Tony's work that we would love to see more of.

Sequential Empathy

The Unflinching yet Sensitive Flourishing of Mental Health in Indie Comics: Part 3

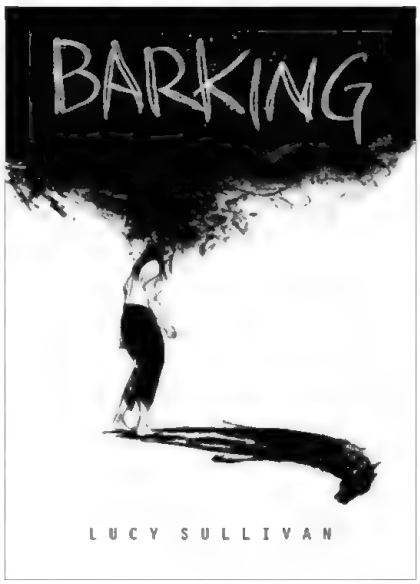
In the third part of our series about mental health in indie and small press comics, Fred McNamarra talks to creators about their increasing popularity and impact on readers.

Mental health's image in independent comics has continued to blossom in the past year, not just in the level of content being produced, but the demand for them grows alongside. Rachael Smith's second collection of autobiographical comics, Stand In Your Power, was one of our picks of the year, and is every bit as unyielding and humorous as Wired Up Wrong. While Lucy Sullivan's Barking was also successfully crowd-funded via Unbound, and resulted in a graphic novel that adds a great deal more narrative and thematic thrust to mental health in indie comics, thanks to its stark yet hypnotic monochrome artwork. They join the likes of Long Division, Skip to the End, Anxiety Me, Every Life I've Ever Lived, Taemons, The Mind of James Svengal, and Quiet Girl in a Noisy World as part of a wonderful selection of high quality mental health comics that are now available within the indie scene.

And there are more to come, as other outfits embark on projects uncovering the ties between mental health and comics. For example, Illustrating Futures, a co-venture between Comics Youth CIC and the University of Liverpool, aims make sense of how compassionate and understanding comics and zines can be when themed around mental health.

Creating a positive message

In a medium that can be easily pigeon-holed into various categories, there's something liberating how positive encapsulations of anxiety and depression can be found within any form of comic. Brain Shoodles' low-key bluntness, Rollercoaster's hallucinogenic qualities, and Tales of the Fractured Mind's epic scale are worlds apart from each other in terms of style, but their tone remains consistent. Just like how mental health can target anyone, mental health representation can be found in just about any form of these indie comics.



Barking was a number of high profile books looking at mental health in 2019

"I've been told by my readers many times that the book made them feel less alone, or that it made it easier for them to explain their feelings, which is amazing," says Rachael Smith. "I'm so happy that I've managed to help people." Fractured Minds creator Roddy McCance echoes Rachael's sentiments. "I guarantee there's always great stuff being made, but I think it's getting it into the mainstream that's the next step. I think that's the power of art. It doesn't belong to the creators it belongs to people that need it."

> "Just like mental health can target anyone, mental health representation can be found in just about any form of indie comic."

Wear and Tear Zine creator Katarzyna continues this theme "My intention is for the readers of my Wear & Tear zines to feel like they aren't alone in their mental health experiences, while helping others understand what mental health problems can feel like if they don't themselves have that experience."

Brain Shoodles Emily Owen agrees: "A little compassion and empathy goes a long way and I'd be so pleased if my comic could help someone who may not have experienced mental illnesses understand them better.

Perhaps that's the true reason why mental health representation amongst independent comics grows in popularity. Confirming their very 'real' nature, these comics don't pretend to offer a clear-cut answer or a quick solution to being cured of mental illness. They acknowledge that it's a prolonged journey, and don't owe the reader a positive narrative or a happy ending. Instead, these books act as an outstretched hand, offering readers some light amidst darker moments, a clutch of brave, bold voices combined together that form an almighty, empathetic roar.

Their literary value can't be ignored either. The continual volume of material being produced that packs in a mixture of thoughtful tenderness and vibrant flair in their narrative and visuals, and their rapturous welcoming by readers suggests the desire to see mental illness depicted truthfully in independent and small press comics shows no sign of losing its momentum.

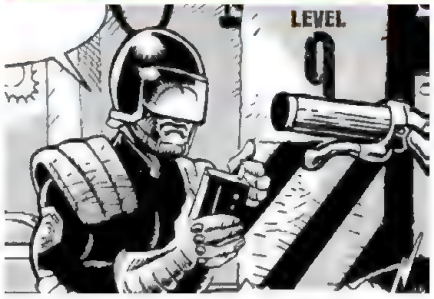
Words: Alan Holloway

2000AD FANZINES

2000AD graced the shelves of UK newsagents in February 1977, at a time when the UK was gripped by the fashion and music phenomenon known as punk. Like the punk rock enthusiasts, 2000AD didn't play by the normal rules. There was a rabid fan base, and as a result some of the more creative ones would create their own comic strips based on their favourite characters. Those who were a bit more organized even made entire magazines dedicated to 2000AD, that were scribbled by amateurs and photocopied at someone's Dad's work behind the bosses back. Whilst punk and it's fanzines died out long ago, 2000AD still stands strong, and still inspires many talented artists, writers and editors to pay homage in the only way they know how.

The interesting thing about dedicated fanzines is the fact that you're playing in somebody else's sandbox. After all, Judge Dredd is the property of 2000AD owners Rebellion, who are known to be very protective of their characters. One can imagine the ire of a writer who sees their beloved creation manhandled by some jumped up fanzine wannabe, but Dredd/Strontium Dog creator John Wagner is cool with it. 'I'm happy for fans to use my characters as long as it's in non-profit fanzines,' he says. 'I read some now and then – some of the stories are actually quite good. I'm particularly impressed by Zarjaz and Dogbreath. It's a good place for budding pro artists to cut their teeth.'

Original editor of Zarjaz Andrew Lewis recalls that not all creators were so amiable about their characters being played with. 'We had been warned off using characters created by Grant Morrison and Alan Moore,' he said, 'but nobody had advised us against using Pat (Mills)'s creations. The first issue included Slaine and Torquemada, and I received a letter from Pat explaining his dissatisfaction with this. He was extremely polite and very complimentary about ZARJAZ and completely understood our motives for creating it. However he requested that we didn't use any of his characters and pointed out that we should really have been advised of this already. Naturally I apologised and the whole thing was resolved very amicably with Pat wishing us well. It did mean scrapping some stories already written for issue



2, including a Termight based script completed by Si Spurrier which I still have a copy of, though I'm sure he's long forgotten about it now.'

Ah, yes... Zarjaz and it's sister publication Dogbreath. These two fanzines are the backbone of the UK 2000AD fan scene, appearing a few times a year and featuring some, quite frankly, amazing work from non professional writers and artists. Whilst Zarjaz is happy to take a scattergun approach when it comes to characters, Dogbreath draws exclusively from the well of the aforementioned Strontium Dog universe. Commissioning Editor, letterer and general flag waver for these publications is Dave Evans, aka Bolt-01 and is the go to guy to ask about 2000AD fanzines. We asked him how he got into it in the first place.

'I've drawn for pretty much my entire life. In the late 1980's I produced a series of self published comics that I shopped around for a year or so. Then in the early 2000's I got a computer and discovered the early 2000 AD forum, which even contained fan comics! I wrote and drew some strips featuring a Strontium Dog (Whistler) that I eventually collected and Dr Bob (original Dogbreath editor) agreed to let me put them out as a Dogbreath special. After that I was hooked and have been here ever since. These days my role as editor and letterer takes up so much time that these days I rarely get to draw.'

I asked Dave what made him want to write his own stories. '2000 AD is, in my opinion, the finest comic being published,' he replied. 'The opportunities for stories in the worlds created for Tharg are as varied as the worlds themselves. They make an excellent playground for a fan to explore and in doing so learn to tell the types of stories that readers of 2000 AD want.' Richmond Clements, who also edits and writes for both publications, is in full agreement. 'Cliché as it is, it really is the Galaxy's Greatest Comic. Who wouldn't want to play in that sandbox?'

"It really is the Galaxy's Greatest Comic. Who wouldn't want to play in that sandbox?"

Both men are happy with the fact that Rebellion pretty much leave them alone, trusting them not to be dicks, but they stress that anyone thinking of doing a similar publication should 100% get full permission first. 'They own the property, after all,' states Richmond. 'It's an astounding privilege to be allowed to play with these characters... can you imagine DC allowing fans to put out their own Batman comics? It'd never happen.'

1980s/1990s 2000AD editor Richard Burton (not that one) recalls that in his time he came across fanzines but rarely had any reason to intervene. 'Only one spectacularly crossed the line by reprinting some of Simon Bisley's work and claiming credit as their own,' he recalls. 'We had to issue a cease and desist order to stop them. Overall we were happy with the fan activities we

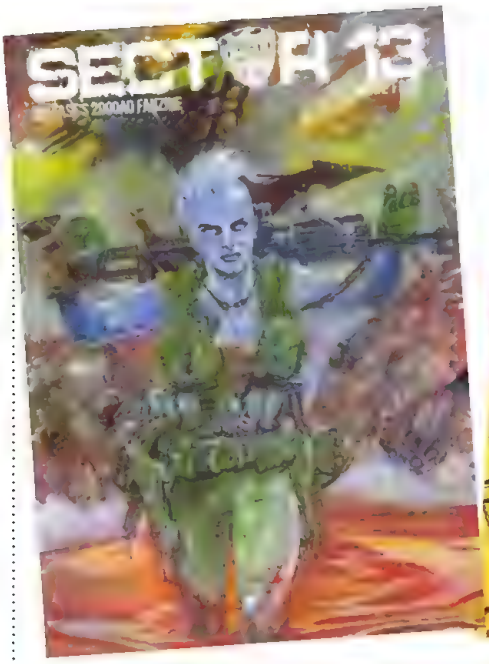
saw – as long as they weren't expecting us to supply material and information to them.'

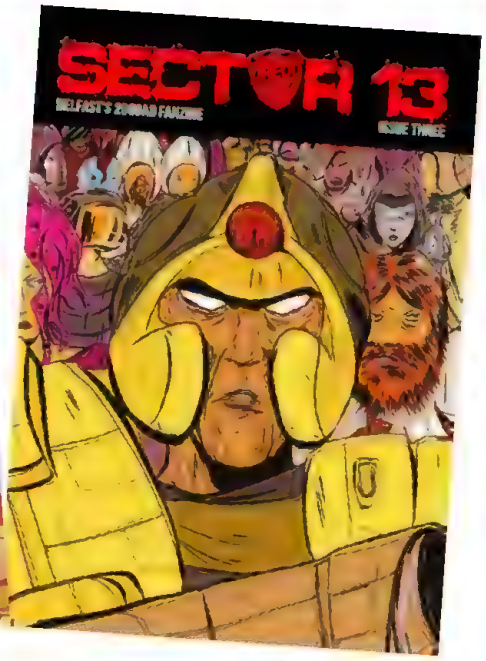
As with Tharg in 2000AD, the fanzines have their own mysterious editors, and in Dogbreath it's Dr Bob, a bearded lady who goes by the real name of Amanda Kear, and she was in the 'zine game even before Dave and Richmond as the original Dogbreath editor. 'I'd been involved with science fiction fandom and their fanzines since I was at school. In the mid 90s I had a "Doh!" moment and realised I could combine these 2 interests to produce a Strontium Dog fanzine.'

Although the fanzines are very careful not to make a profit (this is one of Rebellion's caveats), it's still a rewarding endeavour. 'People saying they'd enjoyed it and demanding to know when the next one was coming out,' said Amanda when I ask what she loved about her time. 'Alan Grant and John Wagner giving me contact details so I could post them copies. Fan artists and writers wanting to contribute.'

Dave Evans is in agreement over the contributors. 'There are so many wonderful things' he said. 'From seeing writers and artists make the transition from fan to droid, to seeing all the amazing scripts and artwork as it arrives to collecting the latest issues from the printer. It really is a labour of love.' Indeed, it's pertinent that the fanzines have seen more than a few future 2000AD contributors come through the ranks. Amanda is happy to reel of a few names: 'Rufus, PJ Holden, Al Ewing, Gary Wilkinson,Gary Simpson'. ' I'm wary to throw names around,' says Evans modestly, 'but they include: Mike Carroll, Karl Stock, Conor Boyle, Dan Cornwell, Paul Williams, Neil Roberts and I'm sure I've missed some.'

As well as bringing new writers into the world of publication, the fanzines often sport gorgeous covers from current 2000AD artists, with the superb Colin MacNeil cover on the current issue of Dogbreath being a fine example. Dave is modest when asked how he manages this on a limited budget. 'The wonderful art droids at Thargs disposal will very often just agree as part of a conversation,' he confesses. 'I've been turned down of course, but more often than not they say yes. As for the limited budget – I've found that offering to provide funds for tea and biscuits to be a wonderful help.'





Entering Sector 13

Finally, we turn to the new kid on the 2000AD fanzine block, Belfast based Sector13. Started by the popular fan group of the same name, the fanzine sets itself apart by being A4 to Zarjaz's A5, and also in full colour using quality paper stock. What immediately stands out inside is the opening Judges photo story, featuring dedicated cosplayers, that is surprisingly good. Editor Peter Duncan explains: 'They started as a way of getting as many of the Dredd cosplayers from our group involved in the zine, but have now developed into something more. We're developing the characters of the cosplayer Judges and featuring them in other stories.'

Sector 13 has also steered away from using 2000AD main characters as much as possible, and instead set their stories in the worlds the main characters inhabit. 'In the future we'll only be looking for strips set in the worlds of 2000 AD (or beyond) rather than featuring Dredd or Johnny Alpha or Rogue Trooper.' confirmed Peter. Much like other fanzines it's a labour of love rather than profit. 'Money from sales is used solely to fund the printing of the next issue, and the occasional reprint of past issues when we run out of copies. We're very strict about that. Nobody gets paid, nobody claims expenses. We do this because we love doing it.'

"It's wonderful seeing writers and artists make the transition from fan to droid"

Having read the issues so far, we can highly recommend the mag, which Peter agrees has improved over time. 'It's got bigger for one thing,' he said. 'Last couple of issues have been 44 pages, which is a sweet spot for pages vs. cost. Also we think we're able to fill the pages with great quality material. We've built up a talented set of writers and artists who want to work with us and we can see development in the quality of their contributions issue by issue. I think we've also become more adventurous. Looking at different storytelling techniques and trying new things, like linking stories and developing the characters of the Judges in our photo-story.'

So there you have it, a small look into the world of 2000AD fanzines. we recommend all three as a damned good read, and you never know – maybe you'll be one of the future writers, artists or even editors, but if it's the last don't forget to as Tharg first!

SMALL PRESS SPOTLIGHT

We look at more books released at Thought Bubble 2019

Hopper ! Detective of the Strange is the latest series from Fairspark Books is a truly delightful throw back crime caper tale. We loved creator Rob Barnes' classic comic strip humour in Gallant and Amos and he does it again with Hopper. Our hero is your classic 40s gumshoe who has to investigate a series of museum robberies – that may or may not be perpetrated by reanimated mummies. There's a hint of Scooby Doo silliness in there as a result, along with plenty of classic crime clichés. However what makes it so fun is that there is no post modern snarkiness or deconstruction in there. Instead it's played for goofy laughs throughout and feels like something from a vintage kids anthology or a classic newstand comic from a bygone age. When done well we are big fans of this kind of no nonsense comic making and this is a great example of how to make a fun book for everyone. Hopper is another fantastically fun series from one of the most endearing and enduring small press publishers around. If you are tired of your kids reading comics which only have plastic tat on the cover and no actual comics, then get them read this instead! **Purchase print and digital versions for £3.00 at FairsparkBooks.co.uk**

Stan Lee and Jack Kirby are already heroes to most of us as the creators of some of our favourite superhero characters. Yet we don't often see then as the heroes of their own comic, which is about to change with Pete Doree's awesome new series **Stan and Jack.** With a story that takes place "between page 23 of Kamandi and pages 9 to 15 of Fantastic Four #30", this is a pulsating, action packed, surreal and spacey adventure of the two silver age comic creating legends. When the two are sucked into a Kirby krackle wormhole, they are taken on adventure through space and time that sees them cross paths with a number of other classic artist and creators, from Steve Ditko to Gil Kane and Wally Wood. It's a story packed with loving nods and quirky in jokes about the two comics legends. Whether you are an expert on the period, or just a fan with a passing appreciation for their work there is something in there for everyone. For example Stan's vocabulary is verbose and over the top, while Doree plays with artistic convention and parodies the artists tropes, from Kirby's love of crackle, to Steve Ditko's shadowy nature to Gil Kane's 'up the nostril' shots. It very much feels like a fanzine style book with the artwork being quite cartoony, but also quite rough and raw. However it is packed full with passion and charm which makes into a genuinely enjoyable read.

You can purchase Stan and Jack from Pete's online store or from Gosh Comics in London.

If you were put off 'The Scottish Play' as a result of some bad GCSE English lessons, then don't pre-judge Kev F Sutherland's new graphic novel adaptation of it, **Findlay MacBeth**. Kev transfers the tale of murder and duplicity from a Scottish castle, to a 1970s factory – the three witches are now the receptionists, while MacBeth, MacDuff and Banquo are recast as feuding regional salesmen. The 70s setting gives it a really unique retro chic to it, and reminded us of all sorts of classic sit coms or TV shows like Abigail's Party, with it's kipper ties, Ford Cortinas and fondue. It's a superb twist on this age old story and makes for a very readable reimagining. Kev mixes the original dialogue with more modern Scottish vernacular to create an interesting mix of styles, but one which seems to work for the most part. The whole thing feels authenticate enough to appease the traditionalists, but with enough nuance to make the change of location work for the story. He also layers up the humour, to make it frequently laugh out loud funny. This is often done with sight gags and elements hidden in the background of pages and see his cartoonish approach really excel. This all helps to lighten then mood overall and prevents even the darker moments from being too over wrought. However, there is still some drama there as he doesn't sugar-coat the story and there is still plenty of murder and intrigue hidden within the marvellous monochrome pages. A really smartly put together and genuinely enjoyable adaptation, which will make you appreciate the story of MacBeth in a way you might never have thought! (While also make you have a craving for Blue Nun and melted cheese on a stick!)

"All you need is a book to sell, a personality and an internet connection, it's as simple as that"

Tom Ward talks to use about his virtual comic con **#KitchenCon**

Even the world of indie comics is not immune to the effects of Coronavirus. While for many self isolating is a chance catch up on their reading, bear a thought for those who rely on comic conventions to make a living.

With events like MCM postponed, what can small press creators do to prevent the negative effects this will have on their work? Tom Ward, creator of Merrick: The Sensational Elephantman has the answer – virtual comic cons! Having started running these 'Kitchen Cons' at the end of last year, the latest event #KitchenCon (a Corona themed special) ran on Saturday March 16th via the app Periscope, and saw a host of small press favourites live stream from convention tables in their own homes

What the inspiration for Kitchen Con?

TM: I started it as a joke because just the idea of setting up all my con stuff at a table and live-streaming made me laugh. I would also say that I totally burnt out on conventions. For a good couple of years I was chasing cons up and down the country and I started to feel that was taking up time, energy, and money that would be better spent on making comics.

So what are the benefits for a creator?

TW: If I live stream at Kitchencon and sell 1 book in an hour it's probably about the equivalent of selling 20 books at a convention that would take up my whole weekend, with the first 19 sales money going towards the table costs, travel, a hotel, the printing of the books themselves etc. Cons can be pretty expensive, and I'm in the fortunate position of having enough books on my table that I'm likely to break even, but even if I make any money the return is generally poor, and most of the time, a total gamble.

With Kitchencon I can do my sales pitch once, with unlimited people at my table, rather than repeating myself all day. Because of the internet I can still get my stuff in front of new people and do the whole networking thing, just cutting out paying to participate and saving myself a bunch of time.

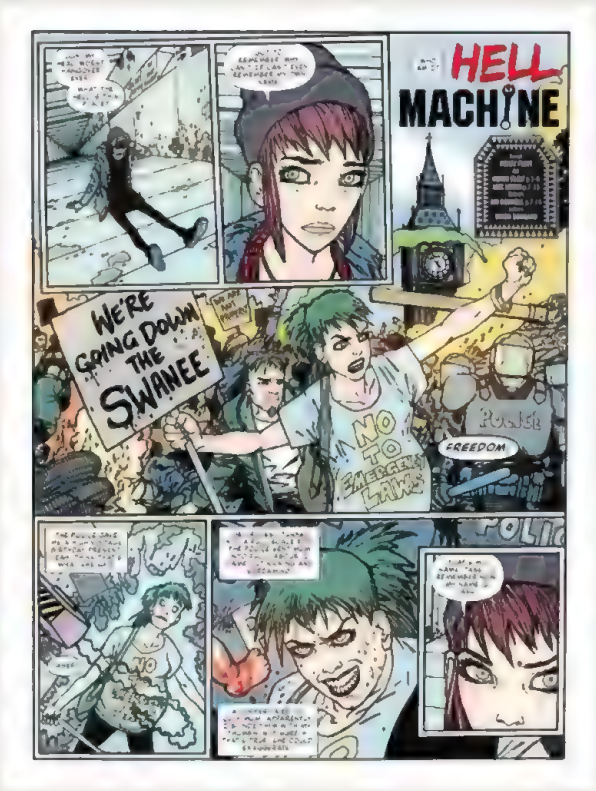
How has it developed?

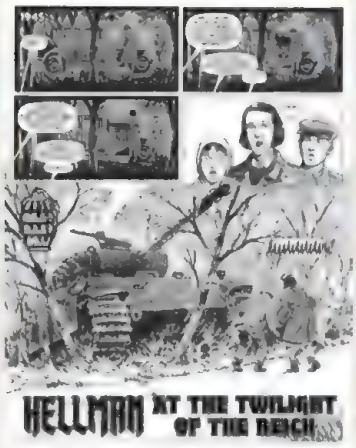
TW: We've done 3 now and each time it's grown with more people getting involved. Kitchencon is a completely free, inclusive event, any comic creators can get involved, all they need is their books, personality, a smartphone, and an internet connection, it's as simple as that.

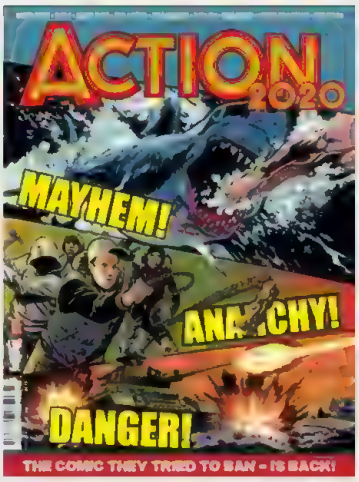
With event getting cancelled do think more people should get involved in events like this?

TW: Obviously with Corona Virus, which only seems likely to get worse, lots of conventions are cancelling or rescheduling, so virtual comiccons online are a natural alternative. As far as I know, Kitchencon is the first organised event of this type, which seems pretty crazy. Already I've seen talk of a few other similar events being planned, but that's just what the internet was created for – to connect people and share ideas.

The next Kitchencon will on 19th April 2020 from 3-4pm. Look out for the hashtag #KitchenConSundayService to get involved! Or follow #KictchenCon to see previous live streams







Action 2020

Publisher: Rebellion Publishing
Writer: Various
Artist: Various
Price: £4.99 from shop.2000ad.com

The latest British comic brand to get the revival treatment is Action. The infamous series from the 1970s which saw Pat Mills and John Wagner cut their teeth and cause controversy.

Action 2020 is an interesting mix of anthology and nostalgia trip. It's very much a homage to the classic comic of the past, yet it has a line up of very contemporary creators like 2000 AD's Henry Flint and Preacher's Garth Ennis along with indie superstars like Ram V (These Savage Shores). It features a mix of classic characters from back in the day brought to life by these new creators, – such as Hook Jaw, Hellman, Dredger and Kids Rule OK, along with an absolutely insane new series from Flint called Hell Machine.

The 5 stories cover off the main genre bases of sci-fi, horror and action, but only really Hell Machine stands out from the crowd as something new and unique. Kids Rule OK is an interesting piece of Mad Max style dystopian sci-fi about a future world ravaged by disease (all very prescient). However it feels very much like a pre-amble to a larger series.

Hellman sees Garth Ennis tell the story of a family being rescued by German tank commander. As you would except with a writer of Ennis' calibre it is a very well thought-out and juxtaposes the heroics of Hellman with the horrors of war. However we found ourselves wondering if a modern audience still resonates with war stories - even well told ones like this?

"Hell Machine has the punk rock spirit of Tank Girl and the inventive deaths of the Saw franchise!"

One story that cannot be questioned is Henry Flint's Hell Machine. What starts off as a fairly outrageous future sci-fi story, soon develops into a nightmarish horror story that sees our heroine Tase attempting to evade various gruesome methods of murder inside a giant death machine. It has the kind of anarchic energy of Tank Girl, but the inventive deaths and gore of the Saw franchise. It's an utterly horrific, yet totally compelling read and feels the most ambitious and unconventional of the 5 stories - and the star of the show.

Overall Action 2020 is a really solid anthology that should definitely appeal to those comics fans who remember the original or who are harking after something more dangerous than the prog. As a one shot, it suffers from having too many stories which feel like they are building towards something long term. However, if this is the first issue of a new semi-regular series then it's a great start and a fitting follow up to a comic with a notorious reputation!

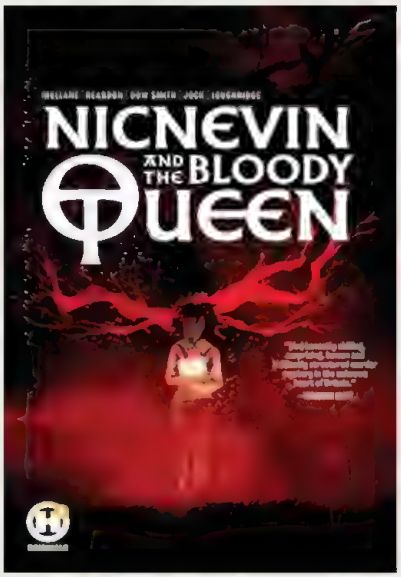
Nicnevin and the Bloody Queen

Publisher: Humanoids
Writer: Helen Mullane
Artist: Dom Reardon, Matthew Dow Smith, Lee Loughridge, Rob Jones
Price: £9.99 from ComiXology

This new book from Humanoids' H1 Imprint has a classic 'why the hell would you even do that' horror premise, as a young family from London move out to rural Northumberland into a cobweb covered cottage for the summer only to get caught up in a world of pagan sacrifice and witchcraft .

Writer Helen Mullane brings together a number of familiar themes from classic horror and British mythology to create a really enjoyable and creepy slice of contemporary horror. The premise is a familiar one, as you have the outsiders coming into the new small town – yet they are not complete unknown as they have the family connection, whether they want it or not. You also have the daughter who is going through some kind of awakening and channelling her new found 'powers' which seem to be brought about through returning to this significant place. On one level it's your age old puberty metaphor, but there is also an element of a sulky urban teen discovering the joys of nature and the world around them.

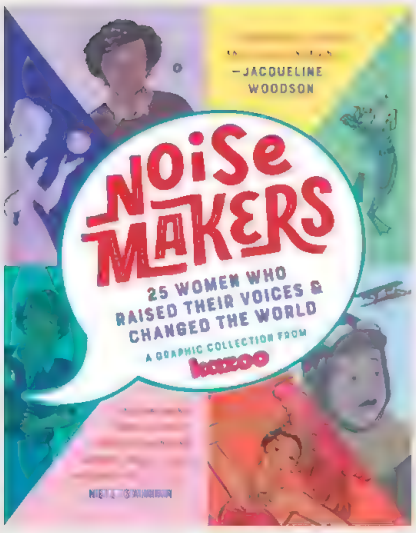
The tone of the book is very British, with a lineage that harks back to



Wicker Man, Hammer Horror, and classic British tales of witchcraft. Yet writer Mullans also manages to also give the whole thing a very contemporary tone which helps make it feel like more than just a knock off of those ell worn inspirations.

Visually the book looks great, with 2000 AD artist Dom Reardon and Matthew Dow Smith giving the book an angular almost Mike Mignola/John Arcudi feel to it, but with a lot more detail. With a cover from superstar artist Jock getting the book a lot of attention and linking it back to his own book Trees, this is a very well put together package - thanks in part to colourist Lee Loughridge and letterer Rob Jones who give the book a richly detailed and sumptuous finish.

Like a great witch's potion, Humanoids have stirred together a cauldron of quality creators who bring their own unique skills together to create something magical and mysterious. Scary without being gratuitous, familiar without being clichéd, and packed with plenty of detail but without being over wrought with complexity and convolution. A really enjoyable slice of very British occult horror!



Noisemakers

Publisher: Alfred A. Knopf Books
Writer: Various
Artist: Various
Price: £19.83 from Amazon

While we have read plenty of worthy anthologies in recent years, perhaps none feel quite as complete and accomplished as this one.

It compiles 25 profiles of historically significant women that previously appeared in the pages of Kazoo Magazine – a critically acclaimed quarterly magazine for girls. The women profiled range from familiar names like Rosa Parks and Mary Shelley to some more obscure choices like aviator Bettie Coleman or Rabble-Rouser Mother Jones.

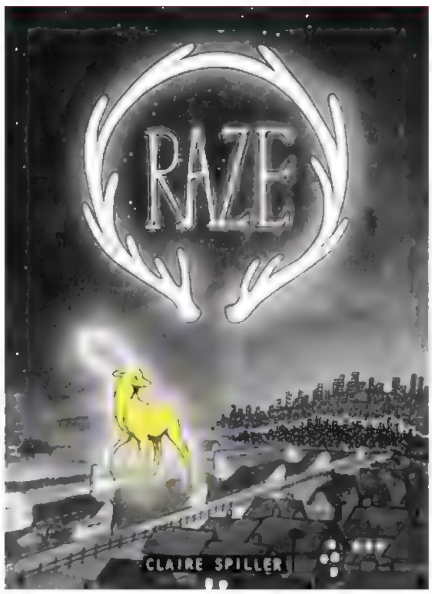
Even though there are plenty of familiar names on here, each creator take s different approach to their profiles and so you find yourself learning about the individual from a different perspective. While the profiles are short enough that you can easily read those you don;'t know and learn something at the same time.

Noisemakers is smart without being elitist, educational without being boring and beautiful to look at, but without ever feeling superfluous or insubstantial. This is the kind of book all young girls should be reading and being inspired by as it is a fantastic showcase of what they can achieve if they choose to make a bit of noise!

"There's a whole range of tragic and uplifting stories about humans clashing with nature"

Claire Spiller discusses her environmental folk tale **Raze**

With it's haunting image of a stag on the cover, and the strange and wonderful creatures inside, Claire Spiller's Raze is a wonderfully thoughtful look at man's impact on nature. With a lot to consider and taken in after our review of it last week, we contacted Claire to find out more about it's inspiration and what she hopes the book can achieve in terms of changing people's attitude towards animals on the road.



Raze is a mixes an ancient fantasy story with a message about the world of today

Can you tell us a bit about the inspiration for Raze? It feels like a mix of classic folklore and contemporary environmental allegory?

Claire Spiller: Raze started out as a sort of coping mechanism during late-night car journeys where I'd see a LOT of dead animals around. Just seeing a fox on the roadside would have my brain spinning - did that fox have cubs? Did it have a mate? How old was it and where had life taken it to end up unceremoniously ignored on the side of the motorway? Eventually, I channelled that into making a story where a glowing white deer curled around each animal and told their stories as a way of acknowledging that they existed and suffered.

Both this, and Lost Light, are built around a strong environmental theme, why is it important for you?

CS: When I think about the sort of stories I could tell I'm always drawn to ones that tie in with real ongoing issues, ones that could not just entertain people but make them aware of something that they might not have thought about before. There's a whole range of dramatic, tragic and uplifting stories when it comes to humans clashing with nature - light pollution and roads are just the tip of the iceberg. It's something that I've definitely seen growing in the indie scene, but it still feels like such an untapped source of storytelling.

We love the surreal creatures at the beginning, which are your favourites and how did you come up with them?

CS: I had a great time designing them. I wanted to keep them as vague and unknowable as possible, but I still had my own little ideas about what each one's personality and function would be. My favourite is the little guy with the '8' shaped head and six legs, he feels like the sweetest, most playful of them to me.

What do you hope people get out of reading a book like Raze?

CS: I always worry that tackling these kinds of subjects can come across as preachy, so I try to deliver my comics in a way that presents you with a journey and then some facts that anchor that journey in the real world. What the reader does with those facts is up to them.

You can purchase Raze for £5 from www.goodcomics.co.uk. And find out more about Claire at www.clairespiller.co.uk

Afterlift

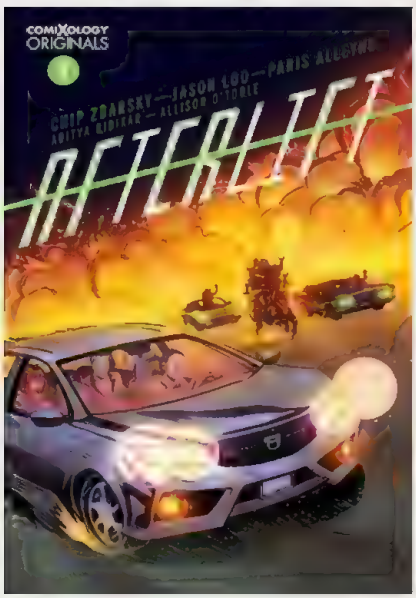
Publisher: ComiXology Originals
Writer/Artist: Chip Zdarsky,
Artist: Jason Loo (Artist)
Price: £2.99 from ComiXology

The latest series from ComiXology's Originals stable sees Sex Criminals' Chip Zdarsky brings us a tale of Janice, a night shift cab driver who picks up a very unusual fare - a demon who is giving a soul a lift to the afterlife!

Afterlift is a fast-paced, exhilarating and highly entertaining read as Zdarsky weaves a great story which flows perfectly from start to finish. After a gentle trundle up the road in the first half of the first issue, Afterlift goes from 0-90 with terrific grace as the pacing revs up with addictive results, slowing down just enough to offer well placed exposition and emotional context.

Jason Loo delivers some exceptionally gorgeous and equally frenetic artwork, balancing the real world and the afterlife expertly. This is given greater focus thanks to Paris Alleyne's excellent colours.

Afterlift is a tremendous story. Well written, fantastically drawn, wonderfully coloured and thought-provoking. another winner for the Originals label and one all readers should catch a lift on.



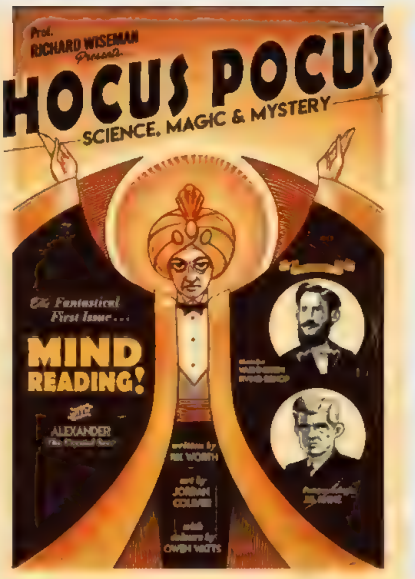
Hocus Pocus

Publisher: Hocus Pocus Comics
Writer: Rik Worth, Prof Richard Wiseman
Artist: Jordan Collver, Owen Watts
Price: Free digital download from www.hocuspocuscomic.com

Be advised, this comic will mess with your mind! Not only does it present a fascinating look into the history or mediums, psychics and para-psychology through the ages, but it will also read your mind!

From the very first page, Hocus Pocus is a truly mind blowing read. On the surface it is the story of three very different, but equally eminent, characters from the world of para-psychology, however there are secret machinations afoot within every page! We start with Washington Irving Bishop a Victorian mind reader who ends up meeting a sticky end due to an unfortunate case of catalepsy; then there's J.B. Rind, the father of parapsychology who attempts to commune with a horse; then finally Alexander – The Man Who Knows – a wealthy mentalist who managed to escape conviction for various crimes due to his high profile and wealth.

This mix of quirky stories from a bygone age work well together. The characters are suitably over the top and entertaining in their own right,



yet they also give us enough of a peak behind the curtain to really feel like we are discovering the secrets of their art.

With gorgeous artwork and panel designs from artist Jordan Collver it has a wonderful vintage style to it that mixes historical detail and cartoonish quirkiness to tell the stories in a visually appealing, but also very cleverly constructed way.

In any other comic, these three wonderfully written and beautifully drawn stories alone would normally be enough to satisfy our appetite and create a wonderful comic, yet there is more! Thanks to creative consultant Professor Richard Wiseman being the driving force on this book (he is a genuine psychology professor who has worked with illusionist Derren Brown), he, Worth and Colver manage to hide small clues and riddles within each story which use simple psychological tricks to help read your mind or direct the story in ways you don't expect. It really helps to add an extra dimension to this already wonderful read and makes you think even more about the inventive and manipulative tricks which psychics have used throughout the ages. (And

This is an utterly magical read, and one made even better by the fact it is free to download digitally, so you have no excuse for checking it out.

In Vitro

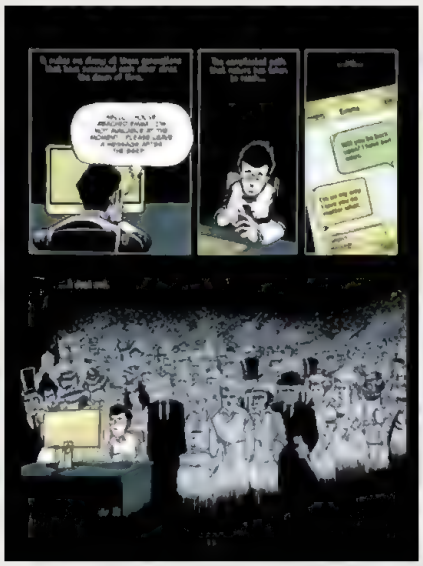
Publisher: Humanoids
Writer: William Roy
Artist: William Roy
Price: £14.52 from Amazon

In Vitro is a great example of how comics can be a powerful medium for explaining emotive and involved issues in a very approachable manner. In this case it is the complex and often embarrassing subject of male infertility.

Guillaume and his girlfriend Emma have been trying for a baby, but without luck. When asked about it by their friends they simply smile and say they are working on it. After a visit to a fertility doctor they discover the problem is with Guillaume's swimmers and begin to explore options such as IVF and adoption.

Writer William Roy handles the mix of human drama and medical explanation brilliantly. He flits back and forth between personal moments; such as Guillaume explaining to his family while being haunted by the ghosts of his family; and then back to scientific explanations about his medical condition from a slightly inappropriate doctor. All of which makes the story both heart breakingly real and also laugh out loud funny.

Just as we have seen in books like Rachael Smith's Wired Up Wrong,



this mix of humour and heart helps explain emotionally difficult issues in a very engaging manner. Roy is able to eke humour out of the small moments, like the fertility doctors inappropriate stress reliever or the awkwardness of medical examinations and procedures.

His cartoony style artwork has that classic European style that mixes expressive cartoony characters with more conceptual pages that feature an almost info graphic style approach to the more complex ideas. This really helps to bring these intimate and emotional moments into sharp contrast against the more over-whelming medical moments.

With fertility issues becoming an increasingly common issue with many families, and one which more and more people are finding the ability to talk about this is a great ice breaker. In Vitro manages to give a personal insight into an important subject and present it in a really interesting and engaging manner.

While this isn't the book you should buy for your friend who is struggling to have a baby, for anyone who has gone through this process and been on this journey, there will be plenty of familiar moments and scenarios that will resonate and make them remember they are not alone.

Sentinel

Publisher: Sentinel Comics
Writer: Alan Holloway, Melanie Bagenell
Artist: Ed Doyle
Price: £3 from www.getmycomics.com

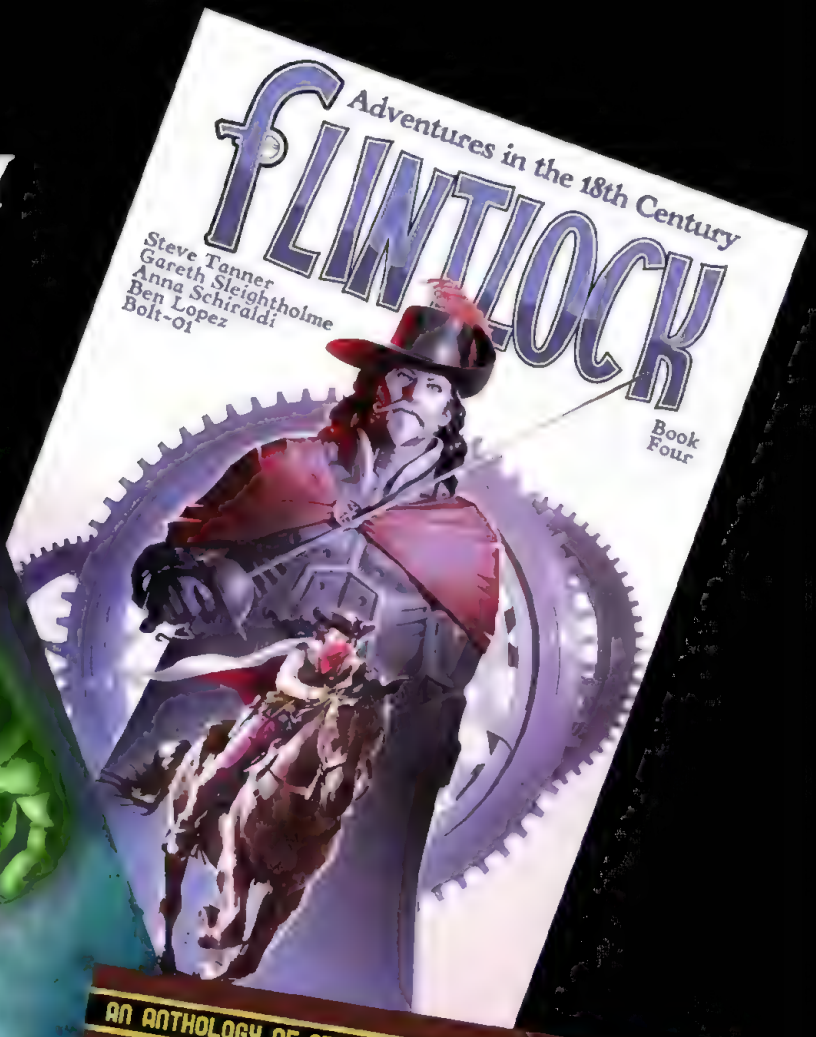
Doyle is your classic rogue-ish space adventurer in the grand tradition of Han Solo or Peter Quill. Along with his fluffy alien sidekick Shorty they are entrusted with a mysterious package to deliver to the all powerful Tsar of Rafica.

As you'd expect in a knockabout tale like this, Sentinel is packed full of over the top aliens and outrageous humour which makes it a really fun read. Writers Alan Holloway and Melanie Bagenell give it a light and silly tone, and clearly love a running joke - especially Doyle's tendency to kick people in the nuts when he gets in trouble!

Visually it looks solid with a nice old school pen and ink style from artist Ed Doyle. It's quite rough and ready and lacks the slickness of a sci-fi series like Sentinent, but it's not trying to be that. It's more a lo-fi, low brow sci-fi sit com in the vein of early Red Dwarf. As such it has a certain charm to it and the tone of the artwork matches the style of the writing well.

It definitely feels like a book put together by a team of creators who are enjoying what they make. As such the sense of enjoyment and humour that runs throughout is passed on to the reader and makes for a fun read.

Comics As They Should Be...



TIME BOMB

www.timebombcomics.com

Going to the Chapel

Publisher: Action Lab/Danger Zone
Writer: David Pepose
Artist: Gavin Guidry
Price: £5.99 from ComiXology

Wedding days are supposed to be unforgettable, however this one just got even more memorable when a group of gun wielding Elvises interrupt the nuptials!

Emily is wealthy heiress who is getting married to handsome architect Jesse. However, just at the key moment in their big day, in walk a group of robbers who plan to steal her priceless jewellery. Among their number is Emily's ex Tom, who still carries a torch for her.

What follows is a rip-roaring and enjoyable heist/kidnap story that has elements of a screwball romantic comedy thrown in for good measure! It's steeped in the kind of crime movie short hand that we love and would make an excellent movie. The Elvises reminded us of the dead presidents in Point Break, while it also has the quirky humour and characters of a Coen Brothers movie like Raising Arizona.

Writer David Pepose manages to build a brilliant ensemble story, that mixes familiar tropes with unexpected twists and turns. It's brilliantly paced, as the action of the heist is interwoven with flashes back and forth to expand the characters and their motivations. Tom is cast as the misunderstood ex who is looking for one more chance at love, while Emily is anything but

the push-over, beautiful bride that might usually inhabit this kind of story. It is fleshed out with some superb supporting characters like the overbearing father of the bride or the fearless grandma who tries to take on the robbers at their own game. There are also some really nice 21st century touches, such as the guests Instagramming the cops to try and get them out as they don't have a cell signal, but do have data!

Visually it looks very slick. With artist Gavin Guidry giving it a very polished, but quite classic feel to it. It has that smart simplicity of Chip Zdarsky's work in Sex Criminals or Eric Zawadski in Headspace and his artwork manages to be strong, but without overpowering the story with overly flashy visuals or layouts. He is helped by colours from Liz Kramer who gives every thing a hot and dirty colour scheme that perfectly matches the locale.

This is a fantastically enjoyable read that deserves to be enjoyed by a wider audience. Like a great crime TV series this is a story which is best consumed in a single sitting, and in the end you will be rewarded with more than a stale piece of cake and a pocket full of confetti!

Clockwork Cavalier

Publisher: Time Bomb Comics
Writer: Steve Tanner
Artist: Francesco Archidiacano
Price: £7.99 from timebombcomics.com

Bursting forth from the pages of Time Bomb Comics' Flintlock comes a tale of London's finest bow street runner, The Clockwork Cavalier.

When an airship begins to rain fire down on London Town and attempt to extort money out of the crown, the Cavalier sneaks aboard the airships and takes on the fearsome Captain Blood, along with the help of new belle Tilly Quickstep. It's a glorious mix of steampunk inspired daring-do, pirating and pulp adventuring that make for a really fun story.

The cavalier is a truly eye catching character, who feels genuinely unique and original. The artwork from Francesco Archidiacono, while not quite as polished as Gareth Sleightholme's work in the original Flintlock, has a dynamism and a sense of style to it. Especially in the scenes on the airship. While he addition of colour doesn't diminish the story at all. A fantastic spin off from one of small press' most unique series, that more than justifies this extended run.

"It's a mix of old styled strips from the halcyon days of comics along with new stories"

BenSKy on the story behind new 'retro anthology **The 77**

While many British anthologies have attempted to usurp 2000 AD, few have attempted it with quite as much ambition as The 77. Bursting onto Kickstarter earlier in the year and with the first issue about to be released to the world, we caught up with editor Ben S Ky to find out the story behind this ambitious new retro anthology

Tell us a bit about the origin of The 77 - it emerged out of a 2000 AD Facebook group didn't it?

BenSKy: The origins of The77 go way back. I was involved in zines back the 80's. I created a character called 'Skate Worm', a drunken, anarchic skate boarding Tequila worm. He appeared in the very popular skate boarding/punk zine 'Skate Muties from the 5th Dimension'. That eventually fed into Deadline in the 90's. I then self published a few other titles through the 90's.

In 2007 I created the original 2000AD Facebook fan page, then called '2000AD- 1977 to Present'. As the group grew a conversation started that has led here. When you host a popular group, that has a lot of very talented and creative people involved, it was perhaps always possible that I might have gotten back into comics. I've gone part-time with my job to really give it my best shot, never imagining how much work was involved but we are a team that take care of our Twitter: **@77Comic**, Instagram: **@the77comic** website: **wordpress.com/home/the77comic.wordpress.com**.

There's a mix of styles from gory fantasy Prodigal, to ideallistic sci-fi The Last Man

Ian Gibson's 'unpublished masterpiece 'The Lifeboat' will be gracing the pages of The 77

It has a throwback feel, especially with the cover, was that an intentional plan for the book?

BenSKy: The77 is, as we say, 'A new retro anthology'. We wanted a mix of old styled strips from those halcyon days of comics from the 50's-90's but also knew that this could be lost on a younger audience, so a blend has been sought where there are more contemporary strips included. The fact that most are between 4-6 pages in length is also telling. It does mean that there is a lot of 'bang for your buck' as such but if anything, we want to give the reader value for money. There are too many crowdfunded zines and comics out there wanting a tenner for 20 pages or so. I think at £6.95 for 68 pages we are honouring the old school comics which in our minds anyway always seemed so affordable

As for the cover, it was a design that took a lot of getting to. We must have created a dozen or so different dummies and when our art editor, Ian Sharman came back with his take, we knew we were very close to what we wanted. I must also say thanks to Steve Green who designed The77 logo. It is very suggestive of those classic British mast heads and I think has a very distinctive yet original feel.

How did you choose which creators to include and did you have any requirement for submitting work?

BenSKy: Well I looked at the 1977-2000AD group and those who'd already prompted the start up. Several were very well known and we were delighted to get their support right back when The77 was at a very embryonic stage, so for example having Steve MacManus, Mal Earl and Phil Elliott involved from the off meant as the commissioning editor I had some kudos and leverage to interest other 'names' to get on board. Shortly followed Kek-W, Ian Gibson, Annie Parkhouse, Steve Austin, Lew Stringer and many other well known and breaking creators.

Our ethos is to have work from the creators we grew up reading, those who we're reading now and those whose careers will probably outlive us. It's very exciting to know that several of the new creators are about to break into the mainstream and indeed I believe that we have some real stars of the future within our first issues.

The requirement for submitting work varies. I wouldn't ask Ian Gibson for his CV or exemplar pages. I grew up loving his stuff and that he wanted to get involved and allow us the privilege of premiering work from Life Boat, his unpublished masterpiece, was just amazing. I feel it's a huge responsibility to handle it in a respectful manner and am delighted to say that we must have impressed Ian because we'll be publishing more from the series in the coming issues!

Others, like Drew Marr from Gold Lion comics, I admit we're taking a complete punt on. He's eleven years old but has been in the publishing game for 3-4 years now. We met at a convention. I loved his stuff and when I found out his back catalogue I knew that the kid could tell a decent story and his collage artwork style is very fresh and he's earned his place in issue 1. And if the editor of the Beano likes him, as does Ian Kennedy, I'm not arguing with them!. For anyone considering a submission email **the77submissions@gmail.com** and we read every piece and always get back to the person with an honest appraisal.

Cover star V is a gruesome futuristic gladiator from Steve Bull and Ade Hughes

The first issue gets off to punk start with Alan Holloway and Neil Sim's Temporal Anarchy

Which comics and anthologies were inspirational to you?

BenSKy: Personally it was Monster Fun, Action, 2000AD and Deadline from the British publishing houses. I was never a superheroes fan, but enjoyed Swamp Thing, Sandman, Hellblazer and most of Fantagraphics output from the 80's -90's and always had my eye turned towards Europe, through Metal Hurlant and the artists such as Bilal, Wilson, Moebius, Druillet and so on.

In fact I have promised Jean-Pierre Dionnet, the original publishing editor, that I'd send him a copy or two. that is quite mind-blowing! For others in the team it was Scream, Bunty, Jinty, Misty, Eagle,Transformers and 2000AD etc, (on the whole they're younger than me.) Obviously having my favourite Tharg involved and being available for advice has been tremendous and I value his experience.

What's the secret to a good anthology?

BenSKy: Ask me that again in a couple of years! I think great writing, keeping the reader guessing with a well structured narrative, nicely poised when going from one episode to the next and of course artwork that leaps off the page. Whether we'll have all those ingredients from the off, I don't know but you can be sure that we're giving it our best shot!

The real secret though is that we have established a very tight production team. Must of us have worked together for a couple of years putting a lot of editorial, reviews and features together in the 1977-2000AD. We are able to share ideas and will always back each other. These are my friends and without them The77 wouldn't exist. So a big shout goes out to Dave Heeley, Steve Bull, Dave Bedford, Paul McCollum and Jo Heeley.

What's the long term plan for The 77?

BenSKy: OK, so I can say that the next edition of The77 'THE SUMMER SPECIAL' will be out in time for August. My intention is to then speed up production and go to a bi-monthly model. We will use Kickstarter again, and have signed up with Getmycomics.com as our distributors. The crowdfunding platform is even more prescient as it builds a digital community and due to most comic stores and regular outlets currently being closed due to COVID-19, we are playing to our strengths via our social media and digital platforms.

If we get to issue 5 there will be a couple of spin-offs from existing strips already in place and the first new title will be 'BLAZE!'. The origins of which are to be found in 'The SheerGlam Conspiracy' by Steve MacManus. It should be with you this time next year. Elsewhere we are looking to confirm a sponsorship deal with a major comic convention held in the West country, and we were to have our launch party there but have of course had to alter our plans. Please follow us on Twitter or Facebook for how we intend to celebrate the launch of The77 on 16 May. Everyone is invited!

The77 launches on 16 May and is available via getmycomics.com and via our Facebook page

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"We wanted to give a platform for indie creators."

Pete Genepool talks to us about the new look **Comichaus Anthology** and the importance of the **Comichaus app.**

This latest issue of Comichaus has come from a long period of hibernation for the comic. What's been going on behind the scenes?
Pete Genepool: We took a much needed time out for about five months just to get our plans straight for the future. It seemed like the best time to do it as we had just released #10 which tied up all the current story-lines. We wanted to ensure that it was going in the right direction and also concentrate on building the Comichaus App content up. We believe the app is so important in allowing readers to discover indie comics, but as with most things it is very chicken and egg. You need the content to get the readers, and publishers want to make sure you have the readers before adding the content! We're very happy now with the way it is continuously growing.

Now out in the wild, #11 of Comichaus consists of one-shots, instead of the usual ongoing strips. Why the change in format?
PG: It was a very hard decision to make, as we always wanted to do an indie 2000ad with the continuing story arcs, but we have found that it was a big commitment for the indie readers, especially as we started it off as a monthly. It is a long time to have to wait to see how your favourite story pans out.

What exactly can readers expect from #11 then?
PG: The same, but with all the stories being self-contained. We are no longer keeping the story pages to just six pages, so creators can spread

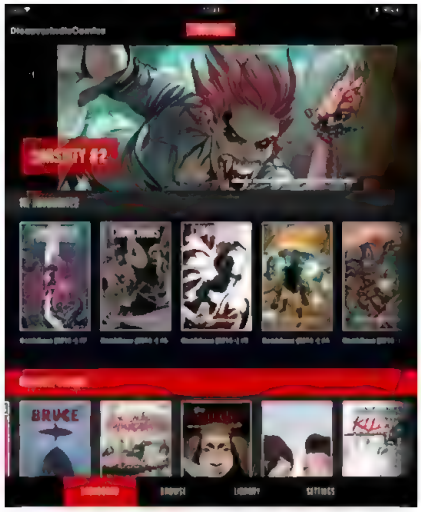
their wings a bit, but essentially we are going to still be featuring amazing indie creators' stories. Cover for issue 11 is by the incredible Adam Brown, who also features as page artist within for his collaboration with Mark McCann. We also have our winner of the University of Dundee competition we ran, where Anna Morozova did art and letters for a script we provided. Creative alumni from such small press publishing groups as Madius Comics and Mad Robot Comics are also involved.

I understand some ongoing strips from previous issues will be continued as trades?
PG: Yes indeed! 'Chalk', 'Karyn Shade' and 'The Troubleshooters' will all have trades coming which will also include the first chapters previously printed in the anthology. Can't wait to see those in print. The creators are just working on these 'Chapter II' instalments as we speak.

How have the various writers and artists involved in Comichaus reacted to the change in the comic's format?
PG: It has been overwhelmingly supportive. I think from the creators' point of view it is an easier sell for them to have one book with their story in it. Or a trade with a complete story, so everyone has been really cool about it.

What will be different about Comichaus from #11 onwards?
PG: It won't be published as often as we were doing previously (monthly) but apart from that it will still be featuring and supporting as many indie creators as we can fit in. We had commissioned a lot of content for the next year before we decided on the new format so we have plenty of stories to publish.

Comichaus has proven to be a fiercely diverse publication. What was your vision for the comic in its early days?
We wanted to give a platform for the indie creators and work with them on increasing their profile, and ours. Grow together in a big creative family I guess. I think with the current climate within the industry diversity is as essential as it has ever been – and we want to strive to keep the quality and the diversity going in the publication.



Comichaus' app continues to bring the best new indie comics to your iPad

Issue 11 features all new one shot stories including Night Swimmer and Blasphemy

Much emphasis has been given on Comichaus the app, but as this anthology demonstrates, Comichaus is also a comic and a publisher. What's it like to wear multiple hats?

PG: I would like to think they do. Featuring indie creators in the anthology, in our other published titles and on the app/marketplace site goes hand in hand in my mind. It all crosses over and we can promote the whole thing and benefit everyone in the long run. Our endeavour is to give something back to the Indies and create a model for them where they can gain more of a profile and have readers discover their comic books. My dream would be for the app to grow to a size where the Indies can make some money and also promote the print copies of their books.

Comichaus has been on the indie scene for two years now, how has the anthology been received in that time?

PG: When James McCulloch and I first discussed doing this crazy idea, I for one had no idea we would have had so much support within the industry. Readers and press alike have been very complimentary and each good review gives us the confidence to try new things.

If you're familiar with the U.K indie scene, every issue of Comichaus features a familiar creator, how easy/difficult is it bringing comic creators on board the anthology?

PG: Thanks to James we were never short of material at the start. He hooked up so many great creators to be involved and it has just snowballed from there. We are constantly being sent submissions but have had to slow things down a bit now as we are quite far ahead scheduling wise. I do feel there is a massive confederation of Indies out there who are all working together and cross pollinating. We have featured quite a few spin off stories ourselves from our peers and I think this mutual support is essential as will undoubtedly be stronger together.

Pete and Comichaus have released original series like 32 Kills and Lizard Men

What does the future hold for Comichaus?

PG: Just continuing to build and support as much as we can. As we are only a small indie we keep having to think outside the box regarding the app and getting the word out there. All of the publishers involved with the app so far have also been amazing at helping get the word out. We would love to keep gaining more and more content from the Indies and hopefully get hold of some of the bigger indie publishers' books as well. We also have four new books out now, '32 Kills', 'Close', 'Lizard Men', and 'City of Lost Souls'.

What's been the most rewarding thing about working on the comic?

PG: Every sale and everyone who reads it. Even one person coming back to a comic con to buy the next issue feels great. From the app perspective – seeing people using the app and discovering their next favourite comic book is a massive buzz also. I personally love looking at how many times everyone's books on there has been read by a member of the public.

Find out more at www.comichaus.com

GUNSLINGERS, DEVIL DEALERS AND COLD ZOMBIES

THE MANIC PAST OF COMICHAUS

Anthologies are ten for a penny across the indie comics landscape. They're a sure-fire way of unlocking diverse writers and artists in creating a work that's stripped of the necessity to be traditionally cohesive. One such publication to give traditional cohesion the middle finger is Comichaus. As if to affirm its metamorphic state, its newest release, #11, signals a new era for the comic, as it does away with the ongoing strips that's defined its existence so far in favour of one-shots. With such a move on the cards, we felt it's due to look back on the comic's past incarnation as a multi-layered anthology with thrills and spills that bleed into each of the comic's first 10 issues.

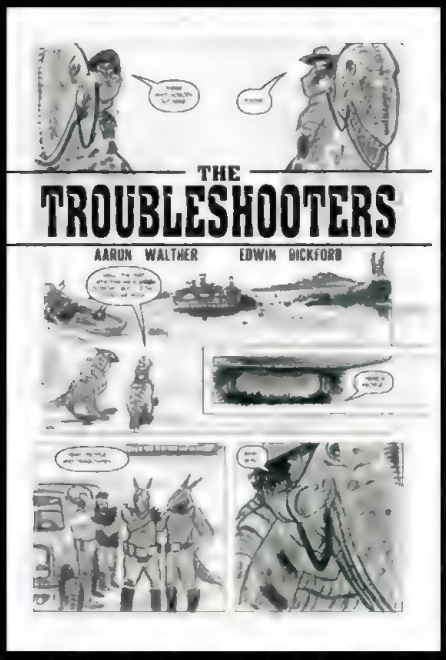
What's instant and steadfast about Comichaus when reading it is a no-nonsense approach to some deliriously nonsensical strips. Stories range from action-heavy science fiction, dystopian Westerns, to apocalyptic human dramas, but each strip is executed in monochrome. Despite the welcome diversity in themes and ideas, the black-and-white approach implants a grim, steadfast mood throughout each issue. The bulk of these strips boast a serialised pattern, which promises to be a stark split from #11 in the years to come.

By its own format then, another key characteristic flourishes from strip to strip - a snarling, punky attitude to story-telling. Comichaus' stories aren't then really told, they're spat out like bursts of rapid gunfire, whether the strip in question deserves that

manner of story-telling or not. Karyn Shade, the first ongoing strip in Comichaus' first issue, is a good example of this. A three-part knock-'em-sock-'em crime thriller with supernatural overtones, it's wraps itself up before its story can be explored robustly. Jessica Byrne's humorous razor-sharp art is let-down somewhat by James McCulloch's script, who's jittery nature matches the horror themes of the story, but rarely settles down to tell a cohesive story.

Card Shark Comics' Feather is a more positive example of how the serialised format of Comichaus works at its most muscular. A five-part mini-epic that depicts the Earth falling victim to a bird-like disease that leads to an Armageddon between the Rapture and the Earth's remaining resistance fighters is given a simple yet conscience emotional canvas. Two estranged lovers, both representing each side, brings the two faction colliding with explosive results. It may not be the most original story you'll read, but it's one of Comichaus' vibrant and narratively successful endeavours. It's bolstered by Dave Cook's well-tuned script, one that balances action and emotion and Norrie Millar's manic artwork, in which landscapes and characters blur together. Perhaps then it's not a case of how many instalments each strip has, but how it uses those instalments.

The Troubleshooters fuses the strongest and weakest elements of Comichaus together by weaving an absorbing universe with a narrative that crumbles into an unfocused affair. What starts off as a delectable affair of tense loyalty as two gunslingers wander into town and offer their services amidst a civil war goes awry when the focus shifts onto a laboured betrayal of love from different characters. The forthcoming collected trade edition of The Troubleshooters, one of several strips to do so, will hopefully correct the course of this strip, or at least make sense of it. Beyond this, any excuse to revisit Ed Bickford's gorgeously swamp-like artwork, a perfect visual companion to its Western themes, is a good one. Chalk is the most glorious



From issue #1, stories like Karyn Shade and Trouble Shooters stood out from the crowd

thing Comichaus has done thus far. A six-part epic that gleefully exploits Comichaus' anthology nature, high dosages of smirk-ridden romance and sky-high fantasy made it an intoxicating read. It's a welcome expansion then to have Chalk be one of the three strips leaping from the anthology into its own collected trade in the near future.

Funny & Frightening

Scattered throughout these early issues are a variety of one-shots whose scope can't help but pale in comparison to the comic's focus on the serialised strips. However, they're often a humorous read and their one-off nature gives each issue a balanced pace. Foreshadowing its future however, towards the end of Comichaus' first era, the anthology grew increasingly reliant on one-off stories and ongoing strips that bore a smaller scope. The sublimely haunting Cold and the oddly youth-orientated yet entertaining Mandy the Monster Hunter became the last of the longer arcs, supplemented by the four-part Homeopathos by Madius Comics duo Michael Sambrook and Rob Jones, a quirky, enjoyable outing into humour-laced psychological action. It's one of Comichaus' later-day gems that showed how briefer strip runs didn't lose the narrative impact of earlier strips.

Later issues condense the insanity still further. Sandwiches and Monochrome Kid from #9 evoke uneasy surroundings yet bear the twisted grin Comichaus has made a trademark for, particularly in the downright weird two-parter Splendid Grins. #10 brings it all home with Gary Welsh's standalone epic The Lost Legionnaire. Lettered by Jones, its melodramatic yet brutish take on historical fantasy sends #10 out on a high, and with it the first run of Comichaus itself.

Throughout its past 10 issues, Comichaus has proven delectable with its growling eclecticism. A palpable sense of menace lingers over each issue, so it will be interesting to see if that menace can drip into #11 and beyond as the newly regenerated Comichaus takes shape. The comic's rough urgency may be in danger of evaporating with the standalone strips, but their one-off nature has the capability to retain Comichaus' delightfully unpredictability. That's always a sign of a great anthology, a familiarity that encourages you to pick the issue up, but an uncertainty in knowing what's inside.

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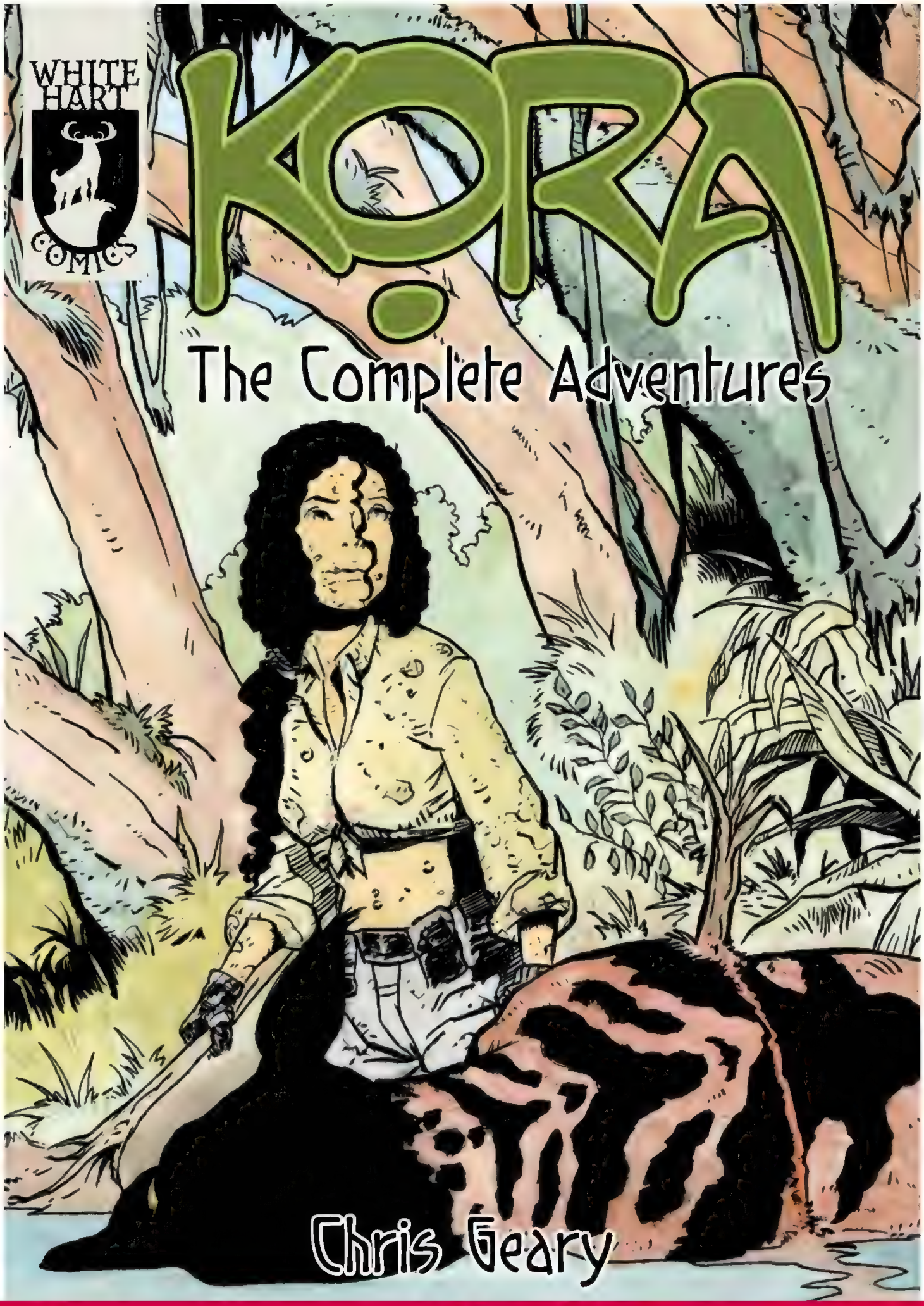

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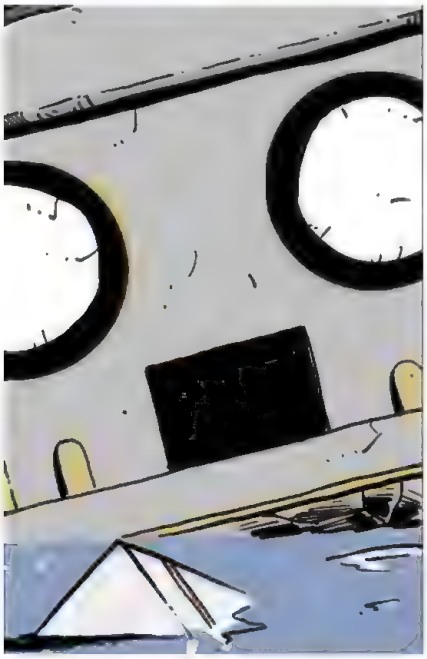

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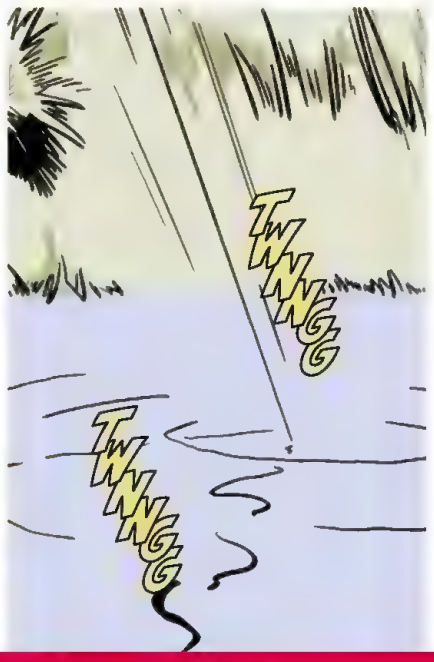
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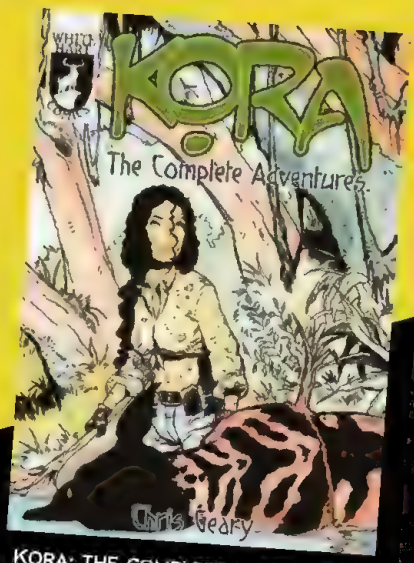

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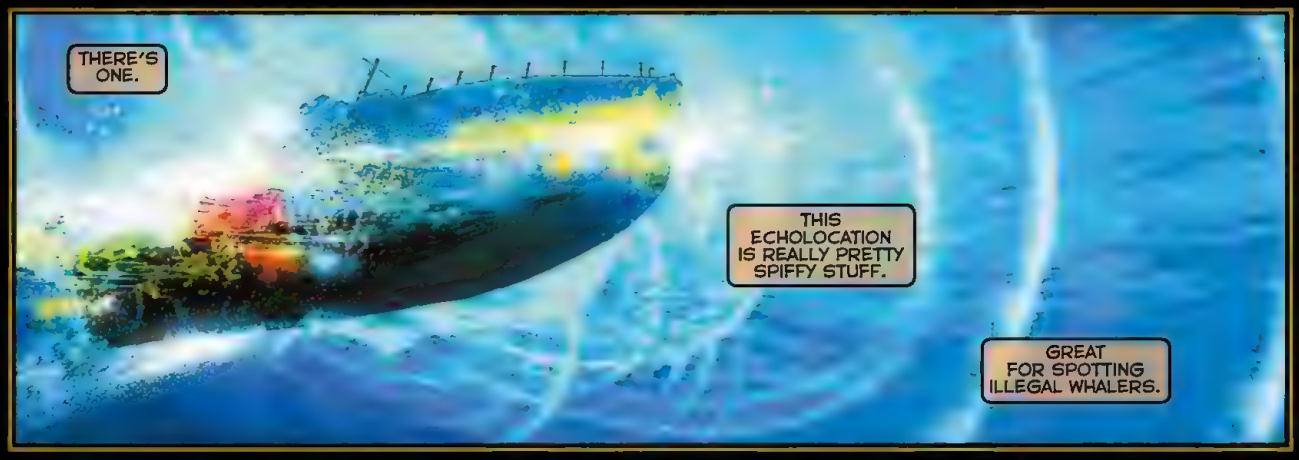
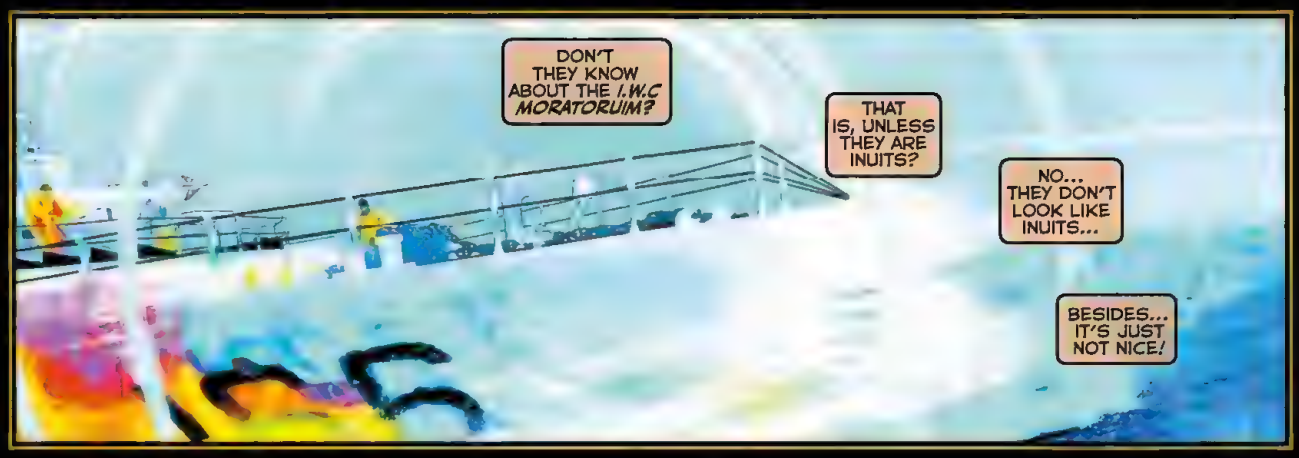
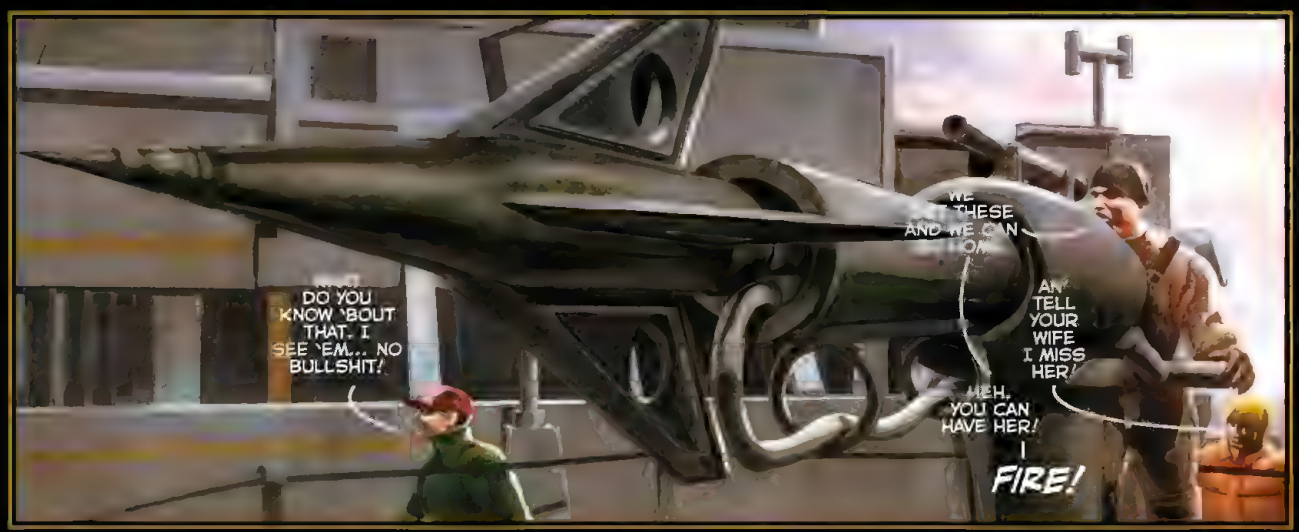



DON'T THEY KNOW ABOUT THE I.W.C MORATORUIM?
THAT IS, UNLESS THEY ARE INUITS?
NO... THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE INUITS...
BESIDES... IT'S JUST NOT NICE!



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SNAP!
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FULL REVERSE... GET US THE HELL OUT OF HERE!

RE-ROAR!
I THINK THAT PUT A GOOD SCARE IN THEM.
CHALK UP ONE MORE WHALE HUNT GONE WRONG... COURTESY OF THE NEMO OF THE SEA MONSTER WORLD!
SIR... YOUR TEA IS READY.
OH... THANKS, JEEVES.
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To celebrate 70 years of Eagle and Dan Dare we set our readers an art challenge to design a 21st Century version of the title or character. Here are two of the winners, David Hill and Charlie Gillespie. Find out more at comicscene.org

EAGLE
2020
KILL ZONE

UK COMICS CREATOR SURVEY

Introduction by Comics Laureate Hannah Berry

WHAT IS THIS?

This is an online survey for everyone making comics in the UK. Over the last couple of decades, the UK comics scene has exploded into the wild, experimental, thoughtful and provocative artistic frontier that we belong to today. To find ways to ensure that this level of creativity and growth can be encouraged, supported, and sustained, we need to get an accurate breakdown of the situation. Hence the survey you see before you.

WHO IS IT FOR?

The survey has been designed to gather information and generate insights about comic producers across a range of creative practice, and at all levels of activity: if you are UK-based and make comics or cartoons for public consumption, I want to hear from you. Regardless of whether you are an internationally renowned comics legend or a newcomer working in secret on your long-form graphic novel or posting strips on Instagram: if you make comics then you are a part of the UK comics community and this survey is for you.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN THEN?

The findings from this survey will be drawn up into a full report and made freely available online. The delicious data will paint a more accurate picture of the comics industry, its strengths and shortcomings, and hopefully show us what we need to do in order to support creators working within it. The underlying anonymous data may also be made available to organisations working within comics, literature and the arts for funding and research purposes if it will benefit the comics community (none of your personal details will be shared with anyone without your consent).

Most importantly, this information will be used to start a discussion - between you and I and everyone else making comics - about what steps we need to take to keep making and selling comics in these uncertain times. To be kept up to date on when the results are released and how you can watch or take part in events arranged to discuss the findings, you can sign up to the mailing list here.

What happens next is up to all of us…

HANNAH BERRY

PS I regret saying "I wish everyone had time and space to complete this survey" out loud whilst holding that cursed monkey paw last year.

About the research

The survey should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete, and as a thank you for your time you can choose to enter a prize draw for to win one of three £50 e-vouchers to be spent in your choice of online comic shop - either Page 45, Travelling Man or Gosh Comics.

Your data will be securely stored and processed by The Audience Agency, who are administering this survey on behalf of the Comics Laureate, for the purposes of research and development. Everything you tell us will be kept confidentially and your responses will be anonymous and will not be used to identify you in any way without your specific consent. The Audience Agency operates within the General Data Protection Regulation and Market Research Society Code of Conduct.
Note: In line with research safeguarding standards, the following survey is only for respondents over the age of 16.

To take part in the UK Comics Creator Survey go to

https://research.audiencesurveys.org/s.asp?k=158626405018

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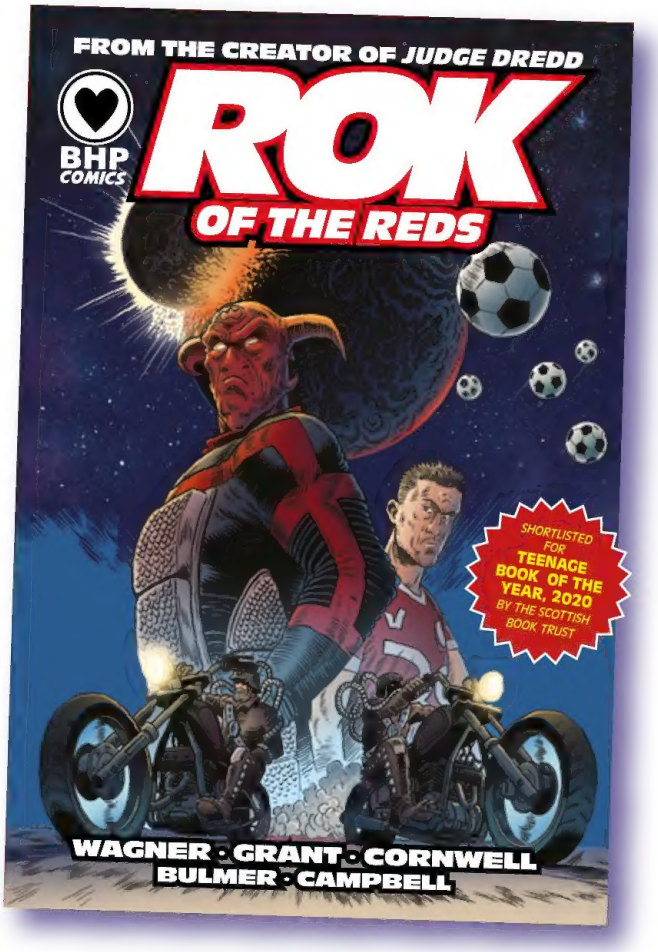
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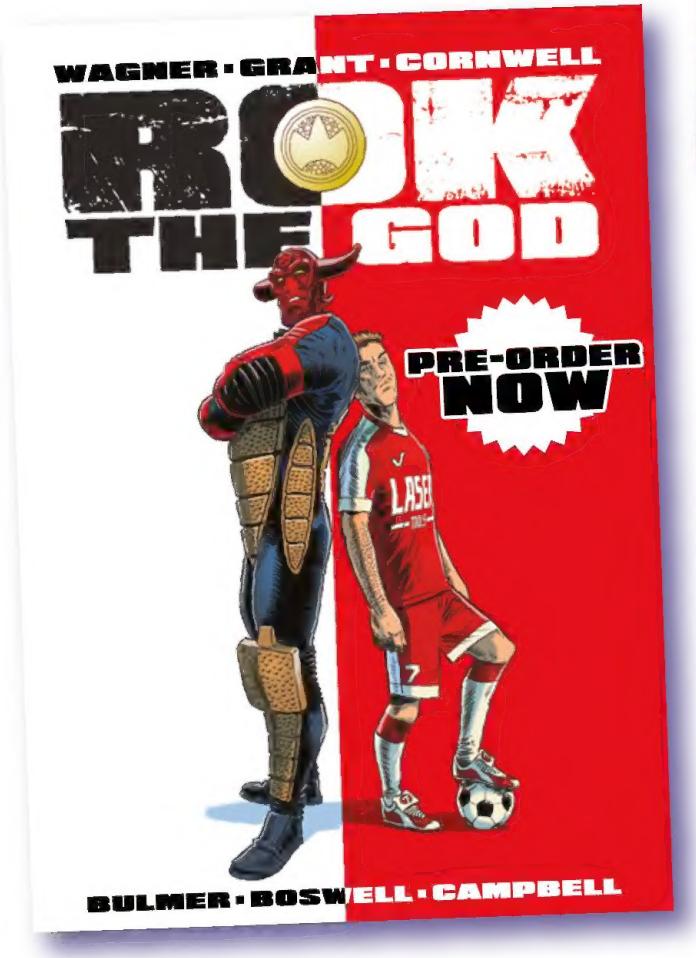

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